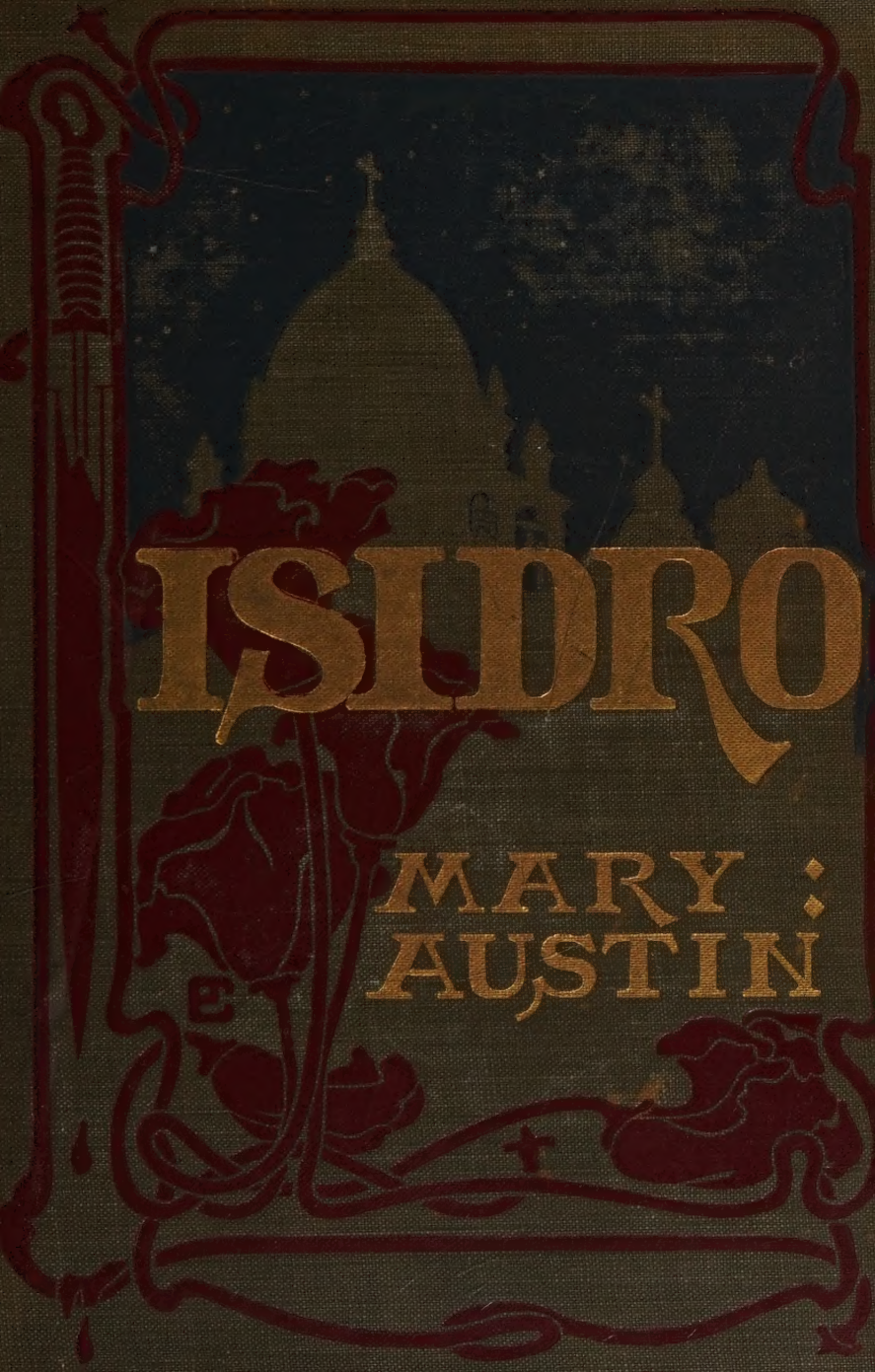
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ISIDRO

HE HAD COME UPON HIM SUDDENLY (*page* 33)

ISIDRO

BY

MARY AUSTIN

ILLUSTRATED BY ERIC PAPE

BOSTON AND NEW YORK
HOUGHTON, MIFFLIN AND COMPANY
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1905

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DEDICATED AFFECTIONATELY

TO MY BROTHER

JAMES MILO HUNTER

122806

CONTENTS

		PAGE
I.	In which Isidro seeks his Fortune	1
II.	Noé and Reina Maria	14
III.	The Hut of the Grapevine	27
IV.	The Father President	43
V.	Ysabel	59
VI.	The Briar	73
VII.	The Road to Carmelo	87
VIII.	Mascado	101
IX.	In which Nothing in Particular Happens	113
X.	The Arrest	127
XI.	The Quest of Juan Ruiz	140
XII.	The Place of Wolves	152
XIII.	Delfina	164
XIV.	Las Chimineas	179
XV.	The Rescue	195
XVI.	Isidro comes to a Conclusion	215
XVII.	A Wedding at San Antonio	236
XVIII.	A Cold Trail	251
XIX.	The Capture	271
XX.	In which Jacinta rides to Monterey	287

CONTENTS

XXI.	A Meeting	304
XXII.	A Word from the Mountains	322
XXIII.	Hidden Waters	336
XXIV.	The Lady's Second Flight	352
XXV.	In which Mascado hears News	367
XXVI.	Forest Fire	381
XXVII.	Arroyo Seco	395
XXVIII.	The End of the Trail	411

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

PAGE

HE HAD COME UPON HIM SUDDENLY (*page* 33)
Frontispiece

"GO IN PEACE, MY SON" 136

"MEND YOUR FIRE, MASCADO" 190

"THAT I SHOULD SERVE GOD — AND YOU" . 422

ISIDRO

I

IN WHICH ISIDRO SEEKS HIS FORTUNE

IT was the year of our Lord 18—, and the spring coming on lustily, when the younger son of Antonio Escobar rode out to seek his fortune, singing lightly to the jingle of his bit and bridle rein, as if it were no great matter for a man with good Castilian blood in him, and his youth at high tide, to become a priest; rode merrily, in fact, as if he already saw the end of all that coil of mischief and murder and love, as if he saw Padre Saavedra appeased, Mascado dead, and himself happy in his own chimney corner, no priest, but the head of a great house. In truth, Isidro saw none of these things, but it was a day to make a man sing, whatever he saw.

Spring exhaled from the hills, and the valleys were wells of intoxicating balm. Radiant corol-

las lapped the trail and closed smoothly over where the horse trod. A great body of warm air moved fluently about him, nestling to the cheek as he rode. The sun glinted warmly on the lucent green of the wild oats, on the burnt gold of the poppies, on the thick silver-broidered rim of his sombrero, the silver fringe of his cloak, the silver mountings of his pistols, on the silver and jewels of bridle and spurs. In fact, there was more silver a-glitter in his dress and harness than he carried in his purse, for he rode only to Monterey, and who on that road would ask toll of an Escobar?

Baggage he had next to none; a change of linen and such small matters; what should a priest do with fine raiment? What, indeed; but an Escobar, it seemed, might have much. His ruffles were all of very fine needlework, his small-clothes of Genoese velvet, his jacket ropy with precious embroidery, none so fresh as it had been; the black silk kerchief knotted under his sombrero was of the finest; his saddle, of Mexican leather work, cunningly carved. And this fine sprig of an ancient house was to be a priest.

It was a matter practically determined upon before he was born, and, being so settled, Isidro was complaisant. The case was this: Mercedes Venegas, a tender slip of a girl, as wan and lovely as the rim of a new moon, being motherless and left to herself too much, had vowed herself to Holy Church and the Sisterhood of the Sacred Heart. But before she had come through her novitiate the eyes of Antonio Ossais Escobar, roving eyes and keen for a maid, had spied her out, and the matter falling in with some worldly plans of her father, she had been drawn back from being the bride of the Church to be bride to the hot-hearted Escobar. Not without a price, though. Don Antonio had been obliged to surrender a good lump of her dowry to Holy Church, with the further promise, not certified to, but spiritually binding, to give back of her issue as much as in herself he had taken away.

So the promise ran, but being long gone by, and himself come to a new country, it is doubtful if the elder Escobar would have remembered it if St. Francis, to whom he vowed, had not mercifully sent him the gout as a hint on that

score. The subject had come up off and on for a dozen years as the malady ran high or low, and found Isidro in no wise unkindly disposed toward it. He liked a red lip, and had an eye for the turn of an ankle; even so he liked the wind in the sage and bloom of the almond; they stirred no deeper ardor than might be satisfied with mere looking. He liked a horse, he liked a cup of wine, and had an ear for a tune. Well-a-day! A priest might look at God's world as well as another, might drink wine for his stomach's sake, and ride of necessity. As for music, it pleased him well, so it were fairly executed, whether it were a rondeau or a hymn.

And, on the other side, there was his father, fond of a merry tune, liking wine very well, a horse better, women more than all three, and so beridden by gout that he could have small enjoyment of any. All said, there were worse things than being a priest. So Isidro Escobar, being turned twenty, rode out to Monterey, singing as he rode a very proper song for a young man, all of love and high emprise, except that he forgot most of the words, and went on making

merry noises in his throat in sheer delight of the trail and the day.

As for Don Antonio, he thought his son very well suited to be a priest, and was vexed with him accordingly. It was a thing that could never have been said of him in his younger days. Other times, when his gout, which he misread for his conscience, troubled him, he felt it a satisfaction to make peace so handsomely with Holy Church. If it had been Pascual now!

Pascual, who had ridden as far as the home inclosure with his brother, and, notwithstanding Isidro's weaknesses, was very fond of him, was at that moment riding back, looking complacently at the tangle of vine and fig tree where the ranch garden sloped down to the trail, and thinking Isidro rather a fool to give it all up so easily, and none so fit as himself to be lord of this good demesne.

As for Isidro, he rode forward, looking not once at the home where he had grown up, nor to the hills that he had known, nor up the slope to the tall white cross raised in memory of Mercedes Venegas Escobar, whose body lay in Zaca-

tecas, and whose soul was no doubt in Paradise; nor thought if he should ever look on these again, nor when, nor how. He was not of the nature that looks back. He looked rather at the wild oats, how they were tasseling; at the blue of the lupines in the swale; at the broods of the burrowing owl blinking a-row in their burrows, and caught up handfuls of over-sweet white forget-me-nots, stooping lightly from the saddle. He answered the pipe of the lark, and the nesting call of the quail, gave good-morrow to the badger who showed him his teeth for courtesy, and to the lean coyote who paid him no heed whatever; and when he came by the wash where old Miguel set his traps, turned out of the trail to see if they had caught anything. He found a fox in one, which he set free, very pitiful of its dangling useless member as it made off limpingly, and finding the others empty, snapped them one by one, laughing softly to himself.

"Priest's work," he said.

That was Isidro all over. Miguel was accustomed to say that the younger Escobar had more thought for dumb beasts than for his own kind,

though the lad protested he would have helped Miguel out of a trap as readily as a coyote. To which the old man would say that that also was Isidro. You could never make him angry however you might try. He was quite as much amused over his inaptness at young men's accomplishments as you were, and he could not be dared to try more than pleased him, but had always an answer for you. There could be no doubt, said the men at his father's hacienda, that Isidro was cut out for a priest.

"Ah, no doubt," said the women, with an accent that made the men understand that they had somehow the worst of it.

For all this they were sorry to see him go; Margarita, who had nursed him, wept copiously in the kitchen; the old Don fretted in the patio, and to hide his fretting swore heartily at Isidro's dog chained in the kennel, and not to be stopped of his grieving, as were the rest of them, by thinking what a fine thing it would be to have a priest in the family.

And all this time Isidro rode singing into the noon of spring, and the high day of adventure.

He crossed the bad land, lifting his horse cautiously from the pitfalls of badger and squirrel holes, scaring the blue heron from his watch, and when he had struck firmly into the foothill trail laid his rein on the horse's neck and fell into a muse concerning the thing he would be. He had sung of love, riding out from Las Plumas in the blaze of morning, but when he came by the place called The Dove in the evening glow, he sang of the Virgin Mary. That, too, was Isidro. His sympathies slipped off the coil of things he had known, and shaped themselves to what would be. He had the fine resonance of an old violin that gives back the perfect tone; you could not strike a discord out of him unawares. That was what made you love him when you had sat an hour in his company, until you had seen him so sitting with your dearest foe, and then you had moments of exasperation with him. You found him always in possession of your point of view; he understood at once what you were driving at. It was only after reflection that you perceived that he was not driven. One felt convinced he would make an excellent con-

fessor. For all his quietness he had his way with women, more even than Pascual, who swaggered prodigiously, and was known to take his affairs to heart. Under this complaisance of mood there was a hint of something not quite grasped, something foreign to an Escobar, like the brown lights in his hair and the touch of Saxon ruddiness that he had from some far-off strain of his mother's.

He had a square chin, a little cleft, a level eye, and a quick, collected demeanor like a wild thing. His lower lip, all of his mouth not hidden by a mustache, had a trick as if it had been caught smiling unawares. He was courteous, — never more so than when least your friend, but seldom anything else. This was that Isidro who rode out from Las Plumas to be a priest, and let his cigarette die out between his fingers while he sang a hymn to the Mother of God.

He rode all that day in the Escobar demesne, having a late start, and slept the first night with the vaqueros branding calves in the meadow of Los Robles. The next day at noon he passed out of the Escobar grant. The trail he took

kept still to the east slope of the coast range, and ran northward through the spurs of the Sierritas, by dip and angle working up toward the summit, whence he would cross into the Salinas. To the left he had always the leopard-colored hills, and eastward the vast dim hollow of the valley spreading softly into the spring haze. As he traveled, the shy wild herds cleared out of the wild oats before him. Jack rabbits ran by droves like small deer in the chaparral. Isidro sang less and smoked more, and fell gradually into the carriage and motion of one who travels far of a set purpose. The light, palpitating from the hollow sky, beat down his eyelids. His thoughts drew inward with his gaze; he swayed lightly to the jogging of his horse. He met Indians — women and children and goods — roving with the spring, for no reason but that their blood prompted them, and gave them the compliments of the road.

He woke once out of a noontide drowse of travel at what promised a touch of adventure. In the glade of a shallow cañon between the oaks he came upon a red deer of those parts, a

buck well antlered and letting blood freely from a wound in the throat, that bore a man to the earth and trampled him. The man — a mother-naked Indian — had the buck by the horns so that they might do him no hurt, but at every move he felt the cutting hooves. The buck put his forehead against the man's chest and pressed hard, lifting and dragging him with no sound but the sobbing of hot breath and drip of his wound. The man looked in the brute's eyes and had a look back again, each thinking of death not his own. Two ravens sat hard by on an oak, expectant but indifferent which might be quarry. Doubtless the struggle must have gone to the man, for he of the two had lost least blood. The Indian's knife lay on the grass within an arm's length, but he dared not loose his hold to reach it. Isidro picked up the blade and found the buck's heart with it. Next moment the Indian rose up, breathing short and drenched with the warm flood.

"Body of Christ! friend," said Isidro, "the next deer you kill, make sure of it before you come up with him."

Red as he was, and covered with bruises, the Indian, who, now that he was up, showed comely in a dark, low-browed sort, and looked to have some foreign blood in him, began to disembowel his kill and make it ready for packing.

"I owe you thanks, señor," he said in good enough Spanish, but with no thankfulness of manner. When he had slung as much as he could carry upon his shoulders, he made up the trail, and Isidro, who felt himself entitled to some entertainment, drew rein beside him.

"Where to, friend?" he said cheerily, since two on the same road go better than one.

"I follow the trail, señor," said the man, and so surlily that Isidro concluded there was nothing to be looked for from that quarter.

"Priest's work again," he said, "to do a good deed and get scant thanks for it. Truly I begin well," and he rode laughing up the trail.

Toward evening he crossed a mesa, open and falling abruptly to the valley, of a mile's breadth or more, very fragrant with sage and gilias opening in the waning light. The sound of bells came faintly up to him with the blether of sheep

from the mesa's edge that marked the progress of a flock. Against the slanting light he made out the forms of shepherds running, it seemed, and in some commotion. They came together, and one ran and the other drew up with him, halting and parting as in flight and pursuit. And across the clear space of evening something reached him like an exhalation, a presage, a sense of evil where no evil should be. He would have turned out of the trail, being used to trust his instinct, but he could not convince himself that this matter was for his minding. How should an Escobar concern himself with two sheep-herders chasing coyotes?

Presently, looking back from a rise of land, he saw the flock spread out across the mesa, and one shepherd moving his accustomed round.

"Now on my life," said Isidro, "I would have sworn there were two," and again some instinct pricked him vaguely.

II

NOÉ AND REINA MARIA

THE sheep which Isidro had seen feeding at evening belonged to Mariano, the Portuguese. His house stood in a little open plain having a pool in the midst, treeless, and very lonely, called The Reed; his sheep fed thence into the free lands as far as might be. The Portuguese was old, he was rich, he was unspeakably dirty, and a man of no blood. The Escobars, who knew him slightly, used him considerately, because manners were becoming to an Escobar, not because the old miser was in any wise worth considering. Mariano was not known to have any one belonging to him; his house was low and mean, thatched with tules, having a floor of stamped earth; his dress and manners what might have been expected. Those who wished to say nothing evil of him could find nothing better

to say than that he was diligent; those who would speak of him only with contempt found nothing worse. He was reputed to have at his bed's head a great box full of gold and silver pieces, — and yet he worked! It was predicted of him that because of his riches he would have a foul ending, and as yet he had not. There you have the time and the people. Mariano was openly a hoarder of gold, and was not robbed; he was diligent without need, and therefore scorned.

His sheep were in three brands, and Mariano kept the tale of them. He had with him, keeping the home flock, one Juan Ruiz, a mongrel as to breed, who spoke Spanish, Portuguese, and French indifferently well, and believed himself a very fine fellow. Mariano used toward him an absence of surliness that amounted to kindliness, therefore it was reported that Ruiz had some claim upon him. The herder in his cups had been known to hint broadly that there was more likeness than liking between them. Whatever the case, Ruiz bore him a deep-seated grudge. Mariano, as I have said, was old, and growing older, and boozy with drink was not a proper

spectacle to be the proprietor of fleeces and gold; and Ruiz, who was a pretty fellow in his own fashion, and loved frippery inordinately, was poor. What more would you have? If ever there was a man fitted to make ducks and drakes of a fortune it was Ruiz, but in this case the fortune lay in a strong box at the head of his master's bed.

On the day that Isidro Escobar came riding across the mesa where Ruiz fed the flock, Mariano, who trusted no one very much, came down to see how they fared, and to bring supplies to his shepherd. Among other things he brought wine; I have said there was the appearance of kindliness on Mariano's side. It was the wine of San Gabriel, heady and cordial to the blood. They pieced out the noon siesta with a bottle, and grew merry. Ruiz clapped Mariano on the shoulder and called him kin; the Portuguese admitted that he had known Ruiz's mother. They sang together, they laughed, finally they wept. That was when they were beginning the second bottle. When they had no more than half done, Ruiz remembered his grievance and brooded over

it darkly, and in the third bottle he killed Mariano, — not all at once as you might say the word, but provoked him, broiled with him, pricked him blunderingly with his knife. Mariano, who was leery with drink half his days, and had no hint of the other's grievance, on which point Ruiz himself was by now not quite clear, was in no case to deal with the affair. At last, sobered a little by blood-letting, he became afraid and ran. This with beasts of the Ruiz order was the worst thing to do. Pursuit whetted him. So they ran and wrestled futilely and struck blindly, for the drink worked in them yet, but Ruiz's knife, because he was heaviest and longest of arm, bit oftenest and to the bone. It was the dust of their running that Isidro saw across the evening glow. Between drink and bleeding they fell headlong into the scrub, panting like spent beasts. But Mariano, having bled most, was most sobered, and began to crawl away, and Ruiz, when he had come to himself a little, began to work after him on his wet trail with the knife between his teeth, leering through a mist of rage and drink. If he had no grievance before, that was enough.

"Ha, you will leave me, hell litter?" he said; and so, voiding curses, he reeled and came up to him, plunging his knife in Mariano's back. The Portuguese fell forward with a wet cough, and the poppies, drowned in blood, shrank all away from him.

Ruiz, for his part, went back to find the dregs of the bottle. He was very merry with himself about Mariano lying out in the sage like a stuck pig. "Ah, ah! but it served him right, setting up for a rich man, who had neither manners nor wit, nor looks, — no, certainly not looks." Then he observed his own wounds, and grew frightened to see them bleed; grew very pitiful of himself, washing and binding them; blubbered over them, thinking new grievances of Mariano, who would so misuse him. So he wept, sitting on a hummock waist deep in bloom, until the day drew into dusk, and the dogs and the flock clamored for their evening care.

"Eh? — Oh, — go to Mariano out there," he said; "he is master," and laughed, thinking it a very fine jest, and afterwards wept again, and so fell into a mindless sleep.

It was in the hope and promise of dawn when he awoke. The sky paled slowly ; here and there peaks swam into rosy glow above the cool dark. He felt the stiffness of his wounds, and groaned, remembering — what? — that Mariano lay out there in the scrub. It was a deep sleep he kept out there between the poppies and the sage; he looked not to have stirred all night. It was a joke between them that Mariano would play out to the end. Ruiz went about the morning meal fumblingly. The sky filled and filled; pale slits of light between the rifts began to streak the floor of the plain. By the spring a mourning dove began to call. The dogs shrank uneasily; they looked at the figure of Mariano, and now it seemed to stir, and now did not. Noé put his nose to the air and moaned with a hushed noise in his throat. Ruiz wished to make haste, but seemed intolerably slow. He strayed out toward the still body as the day warmed him and cleared the mists of drink. "Get up, Mariano," he began to say, but fell off into whispering; a patch of sun lit the blackened poppies, and his ear caught the burr-r-r of flies.

Without doubt the habit of a man's work stands him in good stead; whatever had come to Mariano there was still the flock. They were scattering northward, and Noé and Reina Maria had, it appeared, little mind for their work, but they heard the shepherd's voice and answered it. To bring the sheep together in good form took them a flock's length farther from Mariano. It is probable Juan Ruiz had not thought till then what he should do, but now this was the thing, — to get away; to get shut of the sight and nearness of the dead.

He began to push the sheep into the hills, crossed the trail, and struck up over a sharp ridge. His progress grew into hurry, his hurry to a fever of flight. He pressed the sheep unmercifully; bells jangled up the steeps and down into hollows by paths that only sheep could have taken, by places where were no paths, and at last he wearied them beyond going. He was by this time beside himself. They came to an open hillslope above a stream, thick and slippery with new grass. The shepherd instinct told him the sheep must rest and feed, but his mind gave him no

rest. He killed a lamb and fed the dogs, and since he had eaten nothing that day, ate also, and made out to spend the night. He was beyond the country of the burrowing owls; there was no sound other than the eager cropping of the sheep. There came a wind walking across the grasses that made the shadows stir, and in every patch of shadow were dead men trembling to arise, struggling and twisting so they might come at him. So it seemed to Ruiz. He got his back to a rock and shuddered into sleep. He woke after an hour or two and began to think. He was neither clear nor quick in his mind, but by and by he thrashed the matter out somewhat in this fashion.

It was not likely Mariano would be missed, or, if missed, found again; by now the coyotes should be at him. And if found, what then? There was no witness. The dogs? Ah, yes! They had carried themselves strangely toward him that day. All through his sleep he had heard Noé keening the dead master with a mournful howl. The faith a shepherd grows to have in the understanding of his dogs passes

belief. It is equal to his assurance of their ability to make themselves understood. Ruiz was afraid of Noé and Reina Maria. The sheep also had Mariano's mark; but if he got shut of all these, what was there to accuse him? Above all, his desire moved him to get away and away, and to mix with his own kind. There was a very dull sort of cunning in this that did not at first profit him. He had to battle with the shepherd habit to stay by the flock. Unconsciously he had worked all day against it, but the fear of dead men walking in the dark also held him still. With all this he gave no thought to the great box of reals lying unguarded in the hut of Mariano. About the hour the night breeze fell off before dawn he left the flock on the hill, and began to strike along the ridge by ways he knew, to come into Monterey from the north, which he hoped to do in four days. He left the dead and the witnesses, and carried his guilt openly in his face.

What happened to Noé and Reina Maria with the flock is a matter of record. Mascado, the Indian renegade, for purposes of his own tracked them from the day they struck the rancheria of

Peter Lebecque, backward to where he found the body of Mariano, big and overblown by flies. There was nothing to tell from it except that it had been a man. The flock, it seemed, must have stayed upon the hill that day, or near it, forging forward a little by the trail Ruiz had taken. The dogs ate of the lamb that he had killed, and kept the flock close. They went on a little from there doubtfully, but presently, it seemed, they made certain, by what gift God knows, that the shepherd would not return. They headed the flock toward the place of The Reed, where they had been bred. It is not known if they had any food after the first day; they had not been taught killing. The second night brought them — for they made pace slowly — to a very close-grown and woody stretch of country all a-tumble of great boulders among the trees. They found themselves brought up against a crisis. Through the middle of this copse ran a stream full and roaring from the rains. What urgency they used — Reina Maria who was old in the wisdom of herding and Noé who was young — could not be guessed. Suffi-

cient that they got the flock so near the crossing that some two or three were drowned. But they could do no more; they went, perforce, upstream. Here is a matter for wonder, and made talk in sheep camps wherever the dogs of Del Mar — for they were of that breed — were known. The Reed lay nearest as the crow flies going downstream; the only hope of crossing lay upstream, where there might be shallows, and that way they took. Here it seems was a disagreement. They were hungry, no doubt, overwrought, and one of them loved himself more than the flock. It was a question of saving the sheep who did very well, or saving their own skins. Noé would and Reina Maria would not. So they fought, faint and a-hungered, one for himself and the other for the flock, and the silly sheep strayed bleating through the scrub. The battle went to Reina Maria; it was Noé, when succor found them, that showed most wounds. So they worked the flock up the waterside, which here ran parallel to a foot trail, toward the traveled roads. They had been four days from Mariano, two of them without food, and had come twenty miles.

In the mean time Isidro Escobar had hardly come more. From the oak shelter where he had slept the second night of his journey he had set out leisurely to Los Alamos, which he made by noon. That was the day Ruiz was hurrying his flock across country by steeper ways than the accustomed trail. Between the Escobars and the family at Los Alamos there was amnesty and observance. It lay out of the trail somewhat, but not too far for the courtesy of an Escobar. By all the laws of hospitality Isidro should have stayed a month, but contented himself with three days, pleading his appointment with Padre Saavedra, and the urgence of his new calling, which now began to sit becomingly upon him.

He was, therefore, pushing merrily along the trail that rounded a barren hill running like a cape into a lake of woods that gave off a continuous murmuring. He was riding fast, not certain where he should rest, or if, in fact, he would have any shelter but his cloak, and gave no attention to the way. Toward mid-afternoon he heard afar the slow, incessant jangle of bells that bespoke a moving flock. It promised him other

122806

things, — a meal and company, at least. The wood was scattered more, and marked by an absence of underbrush. Between the boles of oak were grassy plats, in one of which he looked to find the sheep camp. By the rising of the ground whereon the wood stood, and the dipping of the trail, he could not see very far into it, but the sound lay still ahead of him; so, with no other warning, when the ridge of westward hills began to make a twilight gloom in the gully, he came suddenly upon the flock, Noé, and Reina Maria.

III

THE HUT OF THE GRAPEVINE

ISIDRO was an owner of sheep, one bred to an open life, and no fool. He made sure on the instant that there was no shepherd about. Wanting other witness, the behavior of the dogs would have told him that. To make doubly sure he raised a shout that rang and rang among the tree boles and the rocks, and brought no answer.

He looked the flock over and found them sleek; the brand he thought he had seen, but could not be sure. Then he came to the dogs; here was evidence. They looked gaunt and wolfish-eyed; they had wounds, — Noé was caked with blood about the throat. Isidro thought they bore the marks of wolf's teeth or coyote's. They fawned upon him with short, gulping barks and throaty whines, glad and wishful at once in an intolerable speechlessness. Properly

they should have stood off from him and left parleying to the shepherd. The absence of such reserve was the best evidence that they understood the fact, if not the reason, of their desertion. Something of what they had suffered they told Isidro in their dumb way, which was a very good way, since it touched him. His first move, done quickly to take advantage of the waning day, was to cast a wide circle about the flock, to pick up the trail of the vanished shepherd. He found the way the sheep had come with Noé and Reina Maria, but found nothing more. At the first motion of riding away Noé had set up a thin howl, but Reina Maria had the faith of her sex. She waited the event.

"So," said Isidro, "it seems there is no company where I looked to find it, and no fire, though a fire would be a comfort, and no food, but great need of feeding." It was quite dusk in the wood, where the earth was all a litter of rotten leaves. The ripples of the stream, which at this point ran shallowly in a rocky bed, began to climb above the hushed noises of the day; the air had a feel of dampness. Isidro made his

horse comfortable by the stream border, where there was a cropping of fresh grass, and lit a fire of twigs. He thought of supper and then of the dogs, for they looked to have suffered much. He killed a lamb for them bunglingly, as not being used to such work, spattering his ruffles with blood, and was pleased to see them feed. They were in a fair way to get a taste for new mutton.

"My faith!" said he, watching their ravening, "is it so long as that?"

Isidro set to work to piece out the circumstance. Whatever had befallen the shepherd it could not be Indians, since these would hardly have spared the flock; nor wild beasts, though the wounds of Noé hinted at that. It was not possible that a beast which could carry off a man would let the dogs go free. Besides, the sheep were too sleek, too little uneasy; they had had no fright, as would have shown in the case of an attack by wolves or bears. The only thing that was clear was the devotion of Noé and Reina Maria.

"Good dogs," said Isidro, and praised them to their fill, though in an unfamiliar speech.

The bells of the sheep made a friendly tinkle; the flock drowsed; the dogs dressed their wounds by the fire. Isidro heaped him a bed of dried fern and slept deep.

He awoke in the morning twilight; all the wood was astir with wild pigeons, — soft, slaty blue like the sky. The flock was out and feeding up the stream; Noé and Reina Maria stood for orders. Here was a bother. There was no mistaking the attitude of the dogs, — they had shifted their responsibility.

Caramba! Was an Escobar to turn herder, and go straggling into the Presidio of Monterey with a flock not his own at his heels? It was a pity, of course, but clearly not a case for his intervention. So Isidro; not so Noé and Reina Maria. When the man put his horse to the ford they brought up the flock that, also reassured by the man's presence, began to get over in a silly fashion. Directly they had a hint of a new desertion. It went hard with the dogs at first in the shock to a free-given faith. They were checked, bewildered. Noé yelped dismally, and then frankly deserted the flock for the man.

But Reina Maria ran to and fro between him and her charge, back and forth with tongue wagging out and red, wearied eyes, harrying the flock and fawning on the man, not daunted, but persisting until she had won his understanding and rested the case upon the facts. She was fit to burst with running and eagerness. A hundred rods or so of this, and Isidro wheeled back in a kind of comical dismay.

"Your way, my lady!" he cried. "Jesus! but I will make poor work of being a priest if I refuse such begging. Thou art a faithful beast."

"A priest is a shepherd in some sort," he said later, moving with the flock slowly in the morning freshness, "but I doubt the herder has the easier time of it." The difficulties of the work came home to him presently. Thus far he had followed the trail, which grew steep and stony in a great tangle of brush. The light lay level with the hills and too warm. The sheep scattered in the brush, and the dogs were plainly fagged.

To keep the trail grew nearly impossible; besides, it seemed little likely to afford pasture.

"My friends," said Isidro, "it is clear we

shall get nowhere at this rate, and seeing I am new to the business and likely to make a mess of it, do you be so kind as to lead the way."

No doubt communication between man and beast is helped by speech, but it is not indispensable. Noé and Reina Maria knew only Portuguese and a little French, Isidro only Castilian, but somehow there passed from each to each some assurance, sense of understanding. Gradually the dogs assumed the responsibility of the flocks, growing assured as they felt themselves free and Isidro following. They passed out of the thickets, turned north along an open ridge, and by noon made a little grassy swale, through which the rill of a spring ran unseen, though you heard it talking in the grass. Beyond that was rolling country, nearly treeless, lush with wild oats, bordered with poppies, holding little lakes of white forget-me-nots in coves of the hills.

The grass grew up tall, and muffled the bells of the sheep. Then began trees again, — buckeyes bursting into bloom, water oaks strung with long, pendulous vines misty with bloom. Deer stood up in the open places; a band of antelope

flashed by them, three coyotes behind them in full chase; they came upon two tawny cats at their mating in the clear warm space before a rocky wall. They saw no man, neither shepherd nor Indian, nor any trace of one. Those were the days when men shifted for themselves without finiken. So long as the flock lasted and he had the means of a fire — it was still the time of flint and tinder — they would not lack food, and for shelter Isidro had his cloak. But by the time the light had got a yellow tinge from shining slantwise on the poppy fires, they came upon a better shift. Under an oak, mocking the jays with as shrill a voice, sat a slim, dark lad, pillowed on a great sheaf of plucked bloom.

For excuse of his being, a small flock, lacking a brand, fed thereabout, minded by a mongrel cur that looked more for killing than herding, but nevertheless came and went obediently at the lad's word. So much Isidro perceived at the first onset; for the rest, since he had come upon him suddenly, Isidro found himself enough to do to turn aside his own sheep so that the two bands might not mix, — a matter in which the

lad spent no pains. He stood up, though, and seeing him not likely to begin, Isidro fetched a very courteous bow.

"Señor," he said, "will you do me the favor to tell me whose sheep I have, and whither they would go?"

"That," said the lad, "you should know better than I. Keep back your sheep, sir; if they mix, the parting out will be no sport."

"Your pardon, señor; so I should judge, but I am newly come into the business, and the dogs do not understand Castilian."

The herd-boy spoke some words of diverse tongues, mongrel speech of the mixed peoples that come together in a new land, and lighted upon those that the dogs understood, for they went at their work with quickened apprehension. The lad got his own band behind him, and started them moving.

"As for the flock, señor," he said, "whose should they be if not yours, unless you have stolen them?"

"My faith, you have a tongue!" cried Isidro; "but as for stealing, it appears that they have

stolen me, since they have taken me out of my way so that I know not how I shall come at it, nor what to do with them."

"You speak riddles, señor."

"Then I will speak more to the point;" whereupon he told him straightly how he came upon the flock and what followed.

"The brand is Mariano's," said the boy, "and the dogs I think I have seen. Noé?" he questioned, and the dog fawned upon him. "They are Mariano's sheep, and the dogs belonged to Juan Ruiz. They passed a fortnight since. Strange work."

"I know none stranger," said Isidro with much gravity; "and since you know their owner, who is no doubt much distressed on their account, will you do me the favor to restore them? I will give you two reals for your trouble, and the Portuguese will scarcely do less."

The boy knit his brows with quick darting scorn. "The señor does not understand these things. Juan Ruiz has doubtless come to some hurt. Suppose the Portuguese comes upon me unawares with his dogs and his sheep. Will he

believe me if I say I had them from a fine gentleman in the woods?"

"As well your story as mine," said Isidro, beginning to be vastly amused. He rolled a cigarette and leaned against his horse, waiting. The boy frowned, and thought. When he spoke again it was with a curious apathy, as if he had somehow come free of the whole affair.

"If the señor will but come with me," he said.

"As well with you as anywhere," cried Isidro with the greatest cheerfulness. Seeing the boy moving before him with the flock, Isidro took thought of him. He was slightly built for his age, which looked to be fifteen, and was clothed for the most part in very good woven stuff, cut after no fashion but convenience, wore moccasins, and about his calves strips of buckskin wrapped many times, Indian fashion. He had black hair cropped at the shoulders, and falling so as to leave visible only a thin disk of face, dark and ruddy-colored. He stood straightly, and had the fine, level-looking eyes of an Indian, though no Indian, as was plain to see. About his brows he wore a rag of red silk, in which were tucked vine

leaves for coolness; under this penthouse his eyes were alert and unfrightened as a bird's.

They went sidelong on a ridge, avoiding a deep cañon, and came clear of trees. Presently they reached the head of a long, winding shallow that should have held a stream, but flowed only a river of grass and bloom. Down this the sheep poured steadily as if it had been a lane, and Isidro found space for conversation.

"Your sheep?" said he.

"Peter Lebecque's."

"And who may Peter Lebecque be? I have not heard of him, and I thought to know these hills."

"And who may you be that should know such humble folk?" quoth the shepherd lad.

"My faith," thought Isidro, "but this is a sharp one!" Nevertheless, he took off his hat with a very low sweep, being now beside his companion. "Isidro Rodrigo Escobar, your servant, señor."

The boy eyed him a moment through narrowing lids, and then, as if appeased, replied in kind, —

"Peter Lebecque is a trapper; he lives by the

Grapevine where the water of that creek comes out of the Gap."

"And where may that be?"

"It is near by, señor."

"And you, what are you called?"

"El Zarzo."[1]

"El Zarzo? Nothing else?"

"Nothing else, señor."

"But that is no name for a Christian. Had you never another?"

"El Zarzo I am called, señor, or Zarzito."

"Well, well, a good name enough; one might guess how you came by it."

The way began to narrow and wind down; presently they heard the barking of dogs. The gully widened abruptly to a little meadow fronting a cañon wall, looking from above to have a close green thicket in its midst. Isidro, when they had come down to the level, perceived it to be a group of tree trunks overgrown by wild vines that had come up by the help of the trees and afterward strangled them. The twisted stems rose up like pillars, and overhead ran stringers of

[1] The Briar.

vine thatched with leaves. Alcoves and galleries of shade lay between the tree boles under thick rainproof roofs. The outer walls were cunningly pieced out by willow withes, to which the vines had taken kindly; a rod away it looked to be all nature. It was as safe and dark as a lair; the floor of stamped earth had a musty dampness; it smelt like a fox's earth. Bearskins drying in the sun stank very vilely, and dogs lolled hunting fleas on the floor.

Peter Lebecque, who was shaping a trap, stood up as they came, but found no words; all manner of threats, questionings, resentments, played across his eyes. El Zarzo slid away from Isidro and stood in low-toned foreign talk a long time with the trapper, with many a quick-flung look and dropped inflection. They need not, however, have concerned themselves so much; an Escobar had the manners not to hear what was not intended for his ears. Isidro stood by his horse and smoked cigarettes until the sun was quite down.

By that the old rascal, for so he looked, came forward to take his horse. "Will you eat, señor?" he said.

"With the best will in the world," said Isidro.

The old trapper took a pot of very savory stew from the fire, added bread and wine and a dish of beans. They three sat upon stools about a table contrived of hewn slabs, and dipped in the dish, every man with his own knife and his fingers. The day went out in a flare of crimson clouds trumpeted by a sea wind; there was promise of rain.

It appeared that Peter Lebecque knew something of fine manners, though Isidro confessed to himself that he could not get to like the look of him. There was a great deal of polite indirection before they came to the pith of their business.

The sheep, it was agreed, were Mariano's; further agreed that Isidro and the lad should deliver them to-morrow to the shepherds of Mariano, who might be met with about the place called Pasteria. This, you can imagine, was no comfortable news for Isidro, since it took him still further out of his course; but, in fact, there was no help for it.

"It would go hard," said the trapper, "if the flock were found with us. An Escobar is above suspicion, but we, señor, are poor folk." He leered wickedly with beady eyes. Isidro had washed his hands before meat, and the old villain had noted blood upon his wrists.

"As you will," said Isidro, wishing to be rid of the matter, "and then you will tell me how I shall come by the trail to the Presidio of Monterey again."

"Ah, Monterey; it is a very fine town, I have heard."

"I have never been there."

"Nor I, but I have heard, a gay town, and many gay ladies, eh, señor?"

"Oh, as to that I cannot say; I go to Padre Saavedra at Carmelo." Isidro let a prodigious yawn; he was tired of the day's work, and tired of the company. When he had got to bed at last on a heap of skins he had his saddle for pillow, and his pistols ready to hand. "I am not a priest yet," he said, "and the old fellow looks to be the devil or of his brood."

By this the rain had begun, and drummed

softly on the thatch of vines. The old man and the lad had their heads together, talking in a foreign tongue, droning and incessant as the drip of the rain; the sound of it ran on into the night, and mixed strangely with Isidro's dreams.

IV

THE FATHER PRESIDENT

N a cove of quietness back from the bay, between the mountains and the Point of Pines, stands Carmel, otherwise the Mission of San Carlos Borromeo, second of the strongholds of Holy Church established by that great saint and greater man, Fray Junípero Serra, for the salvation of souls and the increasing glory of God. Where the river winds through the mission purlieus shallowly to the sea, rise the towers and chimes of San Carlos, overlooking the alcoves of the Mission and the wattled huts of the neophytes. It looks beyond to the strips of tillage, the winking weirs that head up the river for the irrigating ditches, to the sloping fields of the Mission, browsed over by clean-limbed cattle. Over this clearing and over some miles of oak forest and birch-fringed waters, over rolling pine lands and blossomy meadows, the Padres of San Carlos had

right of usufruct and disposition, over field and flock and folk, rights temporal and spiritual under the hand of the Father President of Missions.

It was, at the time Isidro Escobar set out to be a priest for his own good and the better ease of his father's conscience, a very goodly demesne, a flowery land full of golden-throated larks lilting in the barley, of doves moaning in the blossoming pears, of jays shouting in the sombre oaks. The cattle lowed from the hills, the Indian women crooned at their weaving in the sun.

Upon a day when Peter Lebecque sat knitting his fierce brows in his hut over an Escobar who, with blood upon his wrists, drove Mariano's shepherdless sheep to no purpose, it happened that Padre Vicente Saavedra, Father President of Missions of Alta California, Brother of St. Francis, together with Fray Demetrio Fages, his almoner and secretary, set out to walk from San Carlos to the Presidio on business of the Comandante. Of this business and whom it might concern he knew nothing, but surmised much. At sundown on the previous day an orderly rode out to San Carlos desiring the Father President's

presence with all possible convenience; nothing more from that source, but from Demetrio Fages, a comfortable gossip, he had gathered that a ship of a build such as seldom put into that port had anchored off Monterey. Padre Saavedra had spent much of the time thereafter walking up and down in the corridor.

These were tight times for the Father President. He knew from his college of San Fernando that this new strumpet Republic contrived evil against the Brothers of St. Francis; nothing less than the removal of the mission demesne from under the cure of his order. He knew also that the brotherhood was primed against that attempt, and his faith was great, but of late his mind misgave him. Communication with his college was slow. Whispers reached him from the outside, rumors, veiled intimations.

From Soledad, from Santa Inez, from La Purisima, there were reports of restlessness and lack of reverence among the neophytes. The fact was, the reverend Father President hardly glimpsed the breadth of the disaster. Liberty was awake and crying in the land. The secularization of

the Missions was an accomplished fact while the Padre still hoped to avert it.

Father Saavedra was less shrewd than saintly. In the management of the Missions difficulties arose; if there was a way out he took it; if not, it was indubitably so ordered of God, hence bearable. He looked for the ultimate triumph of St. Francis, but what he could contrive by way of betterment he did. His night's muse had been rather of his own affairs than this business of the Comandante's, which he supposed might be pertinent to the matter.

Notwithstanding his afternoon of years and the heaviness of his concerns, the Padre walked springily toward the Presidio of Monterey. A wet fog that hung in shreds and patches about the pines had left the fields dewy and glorious. Blossoms lapped the trail, birds sang in the woods, Padre Vicente was in tune. He must needs talk, and since this was clearly no time to let vapors, he talked with Fages upon another matter which lay close to his heart, and concerned the good of the order. Said he: —

"You should know something of the family

of Escobar, brother, a very ancient house and a noble one, well set up by marriages on either side. Don Antonio, who has the estates of Las Plumas and La Liebre, you have met. Know, then, that his younger son, called Isidro, is dedicated, vowed, given over to Mother Church and our Holy Order of St. Francis. Him I look to have with me in three days at the farthest. To that end I have had the room made ready next to mine at Carmelo."

This was straight news. If the secretary's eyes had not been cast down as their custom was he would have seen the little flicker of pride with which it was delivered; but then the drooped lids hid also a little prick of alert dismayedness behind them. The good Padre was big with his plan, which was now ripe for delivery. He went on: —

"You will know, of course, that this scion of a goodly house cannot be made a priest here in California, as one might say the word, — that he must needs go to our college of San Fernando, perhaps also to Rome, but in good time, brother, in good time.

"You have heard me speak, Fray Demetrio, of the danger that threatens our great foundation, the work of our brother in Christ and St. Francis, Padre Junípero Serra, whom God assoil, and how that by prayer and the works of the Superior of our order and the intervention of Holy Church it may yet be turned aside." This was as far as the Father President would admit the imminence of that dissolution of the Missions which was so soon to be accomplished, lest by admitting he should make it sure. Anything more implied a doubt of the sovereign powers of St. Francis; St. Francis, it appeared, had other affairs.

"Yet," said Padre Vicente, "in times like these even the least of God's servants, of whom we are, may do somewhat. The coming of this young man into our order at this time should mean much for the Missions, much, Demetrio, and was no doubt so ordered aforetime, as you shall hear." Upon this the good Padre out with the story of Mercedes Venegas and the elder Escobar, and a very pretty story he made of it down to the ruin of Don Antonio's fortune and

the grant to him of the twin estates of Las Plumas and La Liebre. Yet there remained in Mexico members of both mother's and father's houses, men of affairs and good fortune, well friended of the state, who might serve St. Francis a turn.

"So," concluded the Padre, "we have here in this young man, whom I have seen and found well inclined toward the work, that which may win for us many worldly means, by which it is ordained God's work should proceed." Thus the Father President unbosomed himself of his conceit, which was, plainly put, to keep Isidro by him until the spirit and power of the Missions had got into his blood, and then send him to Mexico to be made a priest, and use his family for priestly ends. An excellent plan enough, but too late in fruition. Perhaps Fages knew this; the man was no fool, though reputed slow; no less a saint than many of his stripe, and greedy of advancement. Perhaps Father Vicente made the mistake of taking his subordinate's limitations for granted. Fray Demetrio was a man of no blood and little schooling, but if he had gone far for a man of his parts he might go farther.

Father Vicente was all for Holy Church and St. Francis; Fages was all for Fages. Holy Church was a good thing for you if you could make it so; one might climb by the skirts of St. Francis to some very desirable seat. So when the Father President unburdened himself on the hill trail between Carmelo and the Presidio of Monterey he gave that worthy food for thought. He had hardly done with it at the time they had come to the top of the hill that looks on the town. Out beyond, caught, as it were, in the bight of the moon-shaped bay, the stranger ship dipped to her white reflection on the tide.

"How make you her country?" asked the Padre.

"Venetian by the flag," said Fray Demetrio.

"Venetian. Ah, ah!" The Father President felt a loosening about his heart. What menace to St. Francis could come from that quarter? An hour later he was with the Comandante at the Presidio.

The Comandante of Monterey was a personable man, keen, well set up, not young, iron gray as to hair, as to temper cold steel that re-

membered the pit where it was forged. A just man, very jealous of military power. The Father President and Comandante were, as respected their several jurisdictions, upon the edge of distrust; for the rest, they were very good friends. The Comandante's rooms overlooked the blue floor of the bay and the Venetian ship which lay in the anchorage. The vessel had seen stiff weather and the mercy of God. Off Cape San Lucas, beating before a southerly wind, it became certain the rotten mainsail would never hold; the sound of splitting canvas was like the crack of doom to the crew, who took themselves at once to religion. They found an advocate with God in the person of the Virgin, and by her intervention, being strengthened miraculously, the sail held, and had been vowed to her at the first port of entry. The sailors even now gathered on the beach to walk barefoot, each holding a corner of the canvas to bring it to the church of San Carlos at Monterey. They raised a hymn as they walked, the burden of which came up through the Comandante's window, and served for all introduction to the conversation.

"There came in that vessel, the King's Delight," said the Comandante, "one Valentin Delgado, with letters from the capital upon a matter which concerns the civil authorities, which concerns you, Padre, a little, me most of all." Here was a good beginning, but the Padre waited to hear more. It grew upon him as he waited that Jesús Castro must be older than he thought, not so much by years as by grief. When the Comandante was ready for going on it was curtly enough.

"You knew my wife?" The Padre bowed. "She was a Ramirez. This Delgado comes with word of a considerable estate which has fallen to her or her heirs; failing the direct line it reverts to the Church, — to the Hospital of the Clean Conception at Mexico, to be exact." This was large news, but could hardly be expected to interest a brother of St. Francis; the Padre judged there was more. Presently it came.

"You wonder what further there could be in the matter, since you, Padre, in common with the rest of the world, believe me childless; so, for a

long time, I supposed myself, but the truth is Ysabel had a child." Something of what this cost Castro the Padre guessed, but the Comandante's temper brooked no pity.

"It is true," he went on, beginning to walk up and down the room, "there was a daughter, and no one knows what has become of her. . . . Ysabel was at Santa Barbara; I was putting down the revolt in the south. It was the year of the pestilence. On my return I found my wife dead, and the woman Elisa, her nurse, gone back to her people. Of the child I could hear no word. As you have perhaps heard — as you know" — The pride of a Castro could go no farther.

"As I know, my son," assented Saavedra fatherly. Report had it that the Señora Castro had died of hate for the proudest man in New Spain, whose hair was white with grief of her before his time.

"Well," said the Comandante, "it was not for a year that I heard anything of that matter. Padre Bonaventura, who confessed her when she died, was transferred from Santa Barbara, but when he learned of my return he made occasion

to see me and told me this much. Ysabel was not yet recovered from her confinement when she was taken with the fever, and though the Padre came as quickly as he might in that fearful time, she was soon spent. What she confessed to him was that she had had a child and put it away from her, — I cannot believe her mind right at that time, — but repented. She wished me to have it, for it was mine of a surety. 'Tell him to take the child,' she said, and with that she died." Damp like death stood on the Comandante's brows. Father Saavedra kept his fine hands twisted in a knot, and his eyes on the King's Delight. Men will not look on one another's mortal agony.

Said the Padre at last, "And you found no trace?"

"None. The woman Elisa might have told somewhat, but she had disappeared. Afterward I came upon sure proof that she had died of the fever."

"And now?"

"Now I wish to know more. Elisa was a Christian, and very intelligent. If the child died

she would hardly have had it buried without a priest; if it lived she would have had it baptized. Some of your Padres may know; I am told they keep strict register. Or, at least, whoever had her in charge would have confessed, perhaps."

"The seal of the confessional—" began the Father President.

"The seal of the confessional, Padre," interrupted the other, "has been used before now to restore that which was lost." He shrugged off the implied rebuke of the Padre's uplifted hand and hurried on: "I have heard lately that your college of San Fernando has fallen somewhat into decay. The child is the heiress of the Ramirez; bring me news of her, and I promise you St. Francis shall not suffer for it." It was a relief to Castro to speak peremptorily of what he would do if the child were found: it seemed almost like getting something done; but to do the Padre justice, at this point he had hardly a thought of the bribe to St. Francis, though that came afterward, as befitted a Superior of the order. Just now he was touched as a man by the other man's consuming grief.

"By what marks would you know her when found?"

"None, none!" cried Castro. "I know nothing except the time of her birth. She would be turned sixteen by now. You see I did not know — I was not sure — my wife had not said — I had been four months from home, and it is probable Ysabel was brought untimely to bed. She had not been well in Santa Barbara. Then when I heard that my wife was dead I wished not to live myself; I asked to be kept in active service. But in the end I went back to Santa Barbara, and there I learned about the child."

Slowly the two men beat over the stubble of the Comandante's old grief, but found small comfort in it. The woman Elisa had not been one of the Mission neophytes, and in that busy time she had died without priestly ministrations. There had been another woman with her keeping the Señora Castro's house. It seemed she might be able to tell something if she could be found. It appeared to the Padre that she must be living, for if she had died in any of the Missions she would have confessed, and word of it come to the

Comandante. There were not then so many dwellers in Alta California that the name of Jesús Castro could come up in any such connection and the Padres not know who it should be. The Father President promised to charge his mind with it as he went on his yearly round of Missions, which would begin now in a week or two at most.

It was a matter which could be turned to account in many ways. To serve Castro in this affair would be to turn his influence on the side of the Missions in the crisis which approached, and the reward might be considerable. Besides, there was the heiress herself, who, if found, might be, as a child of the Missions, brought to serve their end. These were the thoughts of the functionary, the head of an order; there was another which was pure priesthood. Father Vicente was jealous for souls, and Castro an indifferent communicant. If now he could be helped in this matter his thoughts might be turned properly toward God and the Church, his mother, who served him. This was sweet thought, and the Padre fed upon

it walking back to Monterey. But what he thought he did not tell to Fages, much to that worthy's discomfiture. The good brother had an itch for news.

V

YSABEL

THIS is a true account of Ysabel Castro, and how a child of hers came to be lost. The rest of the argument has to do with finding her. Most of it was known to her husband; as much as was known to all the world was known to Vicente Saavedra; the rest you shall hear and judge.

If Ysabel Castro had been a beautiful woman, fit to set a man beside himself, Ysabel Ramirez had been a more beautiful girl. There are still extant in San Blas among the gallants there some songs which were made of her worshipfully. They knew how to appraise a woman, those sprigs of New Spain, — her hands, her ankles, her eyebrows, the black shroud of her hair. That she had few suitors for her hand among many lovers was not so much because the Señor Ramirez was villainously poor as that he was villainously proud.

Suitors or no suitors, Ysabel had given her heart to another Ramirez, a cousin in some sort, who had the family beauty, the family pride, and, it may be added, the family poverty. There is no doubt he loved Ysabel; perhaps the young people might have come together and been happy in the face of all these,— such things have happened in New Spain,— but before this could be accomplished Jesús Castro had seen her. Castro was already a made man, and his youth dry in him when the beauty of Ysabel Ramirez shook the crypts of his soul. One is obliged to admit, had there been no impediment, it would have been a suitable marriage. The name of Castro was as good as Ramirez, the fortunes better.

The pride of young men is not the pride of middle age. Ramon Ramirez was too proud to have his cousin if she did not love him; Castro was too proud, loving her, not to have her on any terms. In the end he possessed her, at what cost to himself you shall hear. Always one must admit a certain amount of misunderstanding to mitigate the pitiableness of human affairs.

When Castro began to make favors of small

loans to the elder Ramirez it was merely to ease the need he had of serving Ysabel. When Ramirez began to accept favors he had no hint of Castro's suit. If he had known how much the weight of debt pressed upon the elder man, Castro might not have used such urgency. That Ysabel did not love him he knew, but had no hint of the affair with the cousin; there had been no formal betrothal, and, besides, the body and soul of him cried out for her. The desire of mastery mastered him; Ysabel he would have if he died for it. But Ysabel died.

She had one stormy hour with her father, a stolen one with her lover, and afterward submitted to what was, for her, the will of God. They were all for pride, those dons of New Spain, for name and honor and bravery; but in fact they were a simple folk.

Jesús Castro was at that time Comandante at San Blas, and Ramon Ramirez one of his lieutenants. At the marriage of his superior Ramon held a stirrup for the bride at the church door. Castro saw his hand tremble when her foot was on it, and got an inkling; looked at his wife's

face, and had a revelation. There went to that wedding a broken heart, a slighted troth, a cold exchange of coin, for all of which Castro paid.

Ysabel saw to that. She went to his hearth in scorn, to his bed with cold shudderings of distaste. He had his will of her as far as the outward form, never so far as the borderland of soul and understanding. His pretty plan for marrying a wife and winning her afterward went all awry. It was not that he was too proud to woo, but he lacked knowing how. She met his courtesies with contempt, and his passion with bitter gibes. In all this was no outward quarrel. Her very obedience was a mock. Ramon she had never seen, never tried to see, since her marriage. It was not doubt of his wife's honor that led him to exchange his post to Santa Barbara, where all was strange, but the hope that in sheer loneliness she might turn to her husband. The worst of his unhappiness was that with all her hating he could not unlove her.

At Santa Barbara Ysabel loathed him more, and clung closer to the woman Elisa, who had nursed her.

In truth, I think the poor lady not all to blame in this. With all his will to do her good, her husband's bitter passion would not let him spare her. Besides, her condition — she was by now *enceinte* — no doubt worked a disorder in her mind. Of this, as you have learned, Castro had no hint.

"It would please him too much," said Ysabel to her woman.

Indian revolts in the south kept her husband away from home much of that year, and furthered her plan of concealment. When the Doña Ysabel was near her time, there broke out at the Mission a great pestilence of fever that carried off the natives by scores, and kept every man's mind upon his own affairs.

Those were simple times when nature had a large measure of trust, and women served one another at need. Doña Ysabel had in her hour, which came untimely, the woman Elisa and one other. About sundawn, when they showed her the child, she saw that she had stamped it with her hate, — the very front and feature of the Castros. She turned upon her side and hid her

face. "Take it away," she said to the women, "take it away."

It seemed a weakling, not likely to find breath for going on, and the women had hurried it to the priest for baptism. Father Bonaventura had too much to do at that time for record-keeping; he christened the child, between two deaths, Jacinta Concepcion, and knew no more about it.

Ysabel never saw her child but once afterward. The women put it to her breast, but there was no milk; the rage of grief had dried that fountain. It seemed she might have been tenderly moved toward it, for she looked at it long, and took a medal from her neck to hang about the child's, but at once she rose up in her bed, bright and hot and shaken terribly, crying upon the women to take it away. She seemed not to have any thought but "Take it away! take it away!" and "Never let him know, Elisa, never let him know," meaning her husband, "ah God, never let him know!" So she would fall asleep moaning, and waking fall to crying again very pitifully. It seemed as if the child were a great shame to her which she would hide, as, indeed, such a birth

might be to a woman who was a maid at heart. But the women understood that she was in a fever, and were very tender of her.

On the ninth day the woman Elisa saw that she opened new eyes upon her, strange, but sane. "Go for the Padre," she said to the other serving woman; "it is the shadow of death." The shadow was very near.

"I have been a sinful woman," Ysabel said to the priest between two breaths. "Tell my husband to take the child" — With that she fell a-shuddering so that the Padre made haste to lay the host between her lips. So she died, but when Padre Bonaventura had time to inquire into the matter the woman and the child had disappeared. Doña Ysabel should have shown her repentance to her servant rather than the priest. The woman loved her, and was as reticent as death.

Neither the Padre nor Castro could make anything of it. That they had died of the fever seemed likeliest. Castro fed upon the hint of forgiveness in that last word, "Tell my husband to take the child." Ah, Christ, what would he not give! but to the world he was still a childless man.

As much of this as he knew, Padre Saavedra brooded over after his meeting with the Comandante. He glimpsed a little what had been in Ysabel's mind when she had denied her child — the good father had confessed women as well as men — and a little of the notion of the woman Elisa; but he believed the daughter of Castro still alive, since God, who ordered all things, would hardly let it rise up to trouble his mind if there were nothing to come of it. The woman Elisa was a Christian, — therefore, if living, to be reached through Holy Church. Father Saavedra had it in mind to go through the Missions as with a sieve till she was found, or some trace of her. Castro believed her dead of the plague, but the child was not with her; then she had left it in charge of some other who might still be reached. But the best reason for believing was the urgent need of St. Francis to support his failing cause; the fortune of Ramirez might very well be the ram caught in the thicket for sacrifice. You will easily perceive by this the bent of the Father President's mind.

At the Presidio the Padre had asked Castro

for proofs, — marks of identification by which the child should be known when found; the Comandante, you remember, had said there were none. There was the medal, — Castro had seen it on his wife's bosom, — but they knew nothing of that; and there were marks: the beauty of the Ramirez stamped by the Comandante, — two perfect parted bows of lips, two great eyes under a fine curved line of brows meeting over the high straight nose, a temper quick and restrained, a tongue tipped with the aloe of bitterness that curdled Doña Ysabel's heart, great power of hating, greater for loving. By these marks you should know the child of Ysabel and Jesús Castro when she was found. No doubt the good Padre was right. The surface of waters is troubled above bodies about to rise; something was to come up out of the depths to concern the Comandante and the Father President. Revolving the affair, Father Vicente paced back to Carmelo neither so cheery nor so communicable as he had been in the morning.

Meantime Castro, who knew more of these things than the Padre, but not so much as you

have heard, set straightly about the business of doing something. He sought out Don Valentin, and put it before him somewhat in this fashion. There was an heir, a daughter who would be about sixteen, but she was unfortunately out of touch, mislaid, in fact lost. He let Delgado think what he would of causes, gave him only facts, place, time, the name of the nurse. It occurred to him now as he talked that he had not paid sufficient attention to the other woman; he had been all for Elisa. It grew upon him that here was a clue that might be followed to advantage. All this was interesting, though it was hardly clear what it purported to Delgado, but there was more to follow.

This Delgado was as courtly and serviceable a young man as ever came out of Mexico; a nimble wit and likely to have himself most in hand when there was most need. All the young caballeros about the Presidio were vastly taken with him. He brought them a new style of waistcoat and a new game at cards. The rope of silver around his peaked sombrero was fastened with a great turquoise. The leathers of his spurs had

jewels in them. Besides he could talk, as the fashion then set, of liberty and the Republic, — had all its newest phases very pat.

It seemed from his account that there had been a half-brother of the elder Ramirez who had gone far in the favor of fortune, but not far enough in the favor of ladies to secure him a lawful heir. Dying, his estates fell to the heirs of Ysabel, if any such were found. Delgado freely admitted that he had accepted that quest from the administrator because it brought him to the new land where he had heard estates were to be come by. He had taken ship at San Blas on this same King's Delight that dwindled to a speck against the west. He had no other employment but the business of the heir.

Castro considered that he had here a tool to his hand. Delgado could see for himself — Castro put it to him, walking up and down in the low room opening toward the sea — that he was the man for this affair. Once supplied with money, letters, all the details that were known to the father, this young blade with the quick wit should do wonders. To tell the truth, Castro had made

a perfunctory search. The rage of Ysabel even in her grave had been a thing not lightly to be braved. From the first he had been sure it would baffle him.

Padre Bonaventura was no longer at Santa Barbara, but at San Gabriel. He should be able to set forth the facts freshly. The census of the inhabitants was so strictly kept by the Missions that a careful search must reveal something, and the girl once found, — ah, well, — who so worthy of the doe as he who sped the arrow; to whom should the dove belong if not to him who set the snare? In short, Castro let him know in very courtly and roundabout fashion, and not all at one sitting or in one day, that if he would but find the daughter of Ysabel Ramirez he might have whatever he asked, even to the hand of the heiress. Delgado felicitated himself that things were coming his way, but he would have a surer bond. This polite indirection had a little fallen into disuse in the days of the Republic. He would do his utmost, he said, and marry her — "if so be she was marriageable!" The eyes of the Comandante narrowed to two slits spitting fire.

Marriageable! to a Delgado, the daughter of a Ramirez! Don Valentin kept a level eye; he had seen great men rage before now; nevertheless, he had good manners in the main.

"The Señor Comandante forgets — the señorita may be married by now." This was a check, and Castro let his rage die out while he considered it. Ah, ah, no matter; only find her, the reward would not be wanting. So, finally, a bargain was struck, but at this first interview they had hardly made a beginning. There was very little business in those days in Alta California which could not better be finished to-morrow than to-day.

Delgado had gone off to his quarters in the town. Lights twinkled in the houses and went out. Somewhere out of sight a woman sang to a fretful child, the sentries called across the dark. Over in Carmel Padre Vicente knelt by the bones of Serra; in devotion his soul took flight. Demetrio Fages, near him, moved sidewise on his knees to rest them from the tiles; he prayed with his lips, his hands, and the surface of his mind. The depths of him were busy with other things.

By and by the moon swam into the clear void; it looked in on the serene face of the Father President, sleeping with his hands clasped on a crucifix lest death surprise him; on Delgado, gaming with the young bloods of Monterey; on Escobar, sleeping in his silver-fringed mantle, and on El Zarzo, watching him in the wakeful pauses with black, deep-lighted eyes. But in the house of the Comandante lay shadow of darkness; where no moon could pierce, a man rolled face downward on his bed, who moaned and bit his hands, and cried only "Ysabel! Ysabel! Ysabel!"

VI

THE BRIAR

THE rain was over and gone when Isidro woke in the grapevine hut of Peter Lebecque. It was clear day overhead, and the sun coming up resplendent. Peter Lebecque was busy about the cooking pots; said he, —

"Well, señor, are you for the road?"

"Most assuredly, señor; the sooner the better."

"It is so," said Lebecque; "the Padre Presidente is not a man to be kept waiting." They broke their fast in silence; the boy, Isidro judged, had been fed; the sheep jangled their bells for the start. El Zarzo came up with Escobar's horse and a kicking pinto saddled for himself. He gave no greeting, but his eyes were distinctly friendly. He was dressed more in the fashion of the time, and showed more slenderness. He wore no hat, but the kerchief on his

head was black and new. Rid of the fantastic garnish of leaves, his brows showed under it a fine black line meeting across the thin high nose. Straight black locks clipped his face around and fell under the chin like a veil; so much of his skin as showed had a deep touch of the sun. He was to ride with Isidro and the sheep to find Mariano's men, who would be by this time in the place called Pastería.

There was no ceremony of parting other than this: the trapper called the lad aside and thrust a packet in his bosom; there passed some words between them in a strange tongue, — French, guessed Isidro, — but no farewell.

Escobar, who, now that he was fed and astride of a horse, felt the world to go very well with him, sang as they passed out of the cañon of the vines.

Rain still shook from the laden trees; it lay heavily on the slanting grass, heaviest on the folded poppy buds. Little runnels lined the gravelly slopes; the streams were over-full. Woolly patches of cloud clung about the shouldering hills and flocked in the cañons. Where

their horses trod among the wild oats there was a sound of showers. It was a morning of deep, unmastered joy. They went slowly by dim, sweet trails, for the lambs made small progress in the wetness.

The sun warmed and dried them soon enough; warmed the blood of the lad, who played a thousand impish tricks, — scurried on steep hillsides, went needlessly about in the scrub to increase the way, chased the hill creatures, and gave them call for call. He rode one of the wild horses native to those hills, on a saddle of Indian make, lacking the high pommel of the Spaniard, and rode like an Indian, indifferently on one side or the other, on neck or rump. With all he watched Escobar with alert intentness.

At mid-morning they struck into a belt of chaparral in the wash of a sometime flood, very gaudy at this season with wild gourd and cactus flower. Rabbits herded here, scarcely fearful of men or dogs. In the clear vault above them eagles swooped and hung. Suddenly one dropped with a great spread of pinions on the cactus scrub. It struck and halted, sweeping forward slowly for

the rise, and from its pierced quarry came a cry anguished and human. Isidro, startled out of a muse, clapped spurs to his horse. As the eagle rose to his level, he struck it sharply with his silver-handled quirt. The great bird, amazed, loosed his hold upon the rabbit, which made off in the chaparral, squealing pitifully. The eagle showed fight for a moment, thought better of it, sailed off to new depredations.

El Zarzo rode up astounded. "What!" he said.

"My faith," said Isidro, "but I can never hear one of them scream for pain and be quiet." He was ashamed of his weakness and ashamed of his shame.

"Rabbits were made to be eaten," said the shepherd lad, "and eagles to eat them."

Isidro recovered himself.

"It is not fitting that a priest should see killing done," he said.

The boy edged up his pony and slacked rein; clearly this fine gentleman was not to be feared, and might repay study.

"Are you a priest, señor?"

"I am about to be."

"What is he, a priest?"

"A priest, *Virgen Santisima!* A priest is a very holy man, in the service of God and our Saviour and St. Francis, or other of God's saints. Hast never seen one?"

"One. He was fat, and had small hair, and wore a dress like a woman's. You look not like such a one. When my mother lay a-dying she was all for a priest. 'A priest, a priest!' she would cry, but when one was fetched she was already gone."

"She was, no doubt, a very good Christian."

"She was a Cahuiallas," said the boy.

"A Cahuiallas! Thou?"

"Of that tribe."

Isidro looked at the fine, small face under the fall of hair. "Nevertheless, you are no Indian," was his thought.

"But what does he do, a priest?"

"My faith, the boy is a stark heathen!" cried Isidro. "A priest is for marrying and christening and burying. He doeth on earth the works of our Father Christ."

"My mother had a Christ," said El Zarzo, "silver, on a black cross. In the sickness it is a great comfort."

Isidro had a fine feeling for situations; he tuned himself to the boy's key. Their talk was all of the wood and its ways, trapper's and shepherd's talk, suited to their present shift. For food the boy had brought jerke of venison, barley cakes, and dried figs. They took their nooning under an oak with great content.

El Zarzo pushed the sheep shrewdly; their way lay by high windy slopes, by shallow cañons under a sky of leaves. They worked up water courses reeking sweet with buckeye bloom; they forded streams swollen with the rain. So evening brought them to the place called Pastería, — a long valley running north and south between broken ridges full of lairs. Spare branched pines spiked the upper rim of it; oaks stood up here and there; along the shallow groove that sometimes held a stream, a fringe of birches. The sheep passed down the shore of the valley, and the purple glow of evening lapped them like a tide; burrowing owls began to call; night hawks

set their dusky barred wings above the scrub. Far across the pastures a rosy flame blossomed out against the dark, and settled to a glow. It was the camp-fire of Mariano's men.

"They come this way," said the boy. "Rest here, and by the third hour after sunrise they will come up with us." They lit a fire of sticks, and had a meal. Pastería flooded with soft dusk, and the rim of it melted into the sky. Noé and Reina Maria kept their accustomed round.

"Señor," said the boy as he lay in his bright serape by the dying fire, "do you like it, being a priest?"

"It is a great honor, and greatly to the soul's salvation to serve God and Holy Church."

"But do you like it?"

"Yes," said Escobar, forced to deal simply in the face of such simplicity. As well put on airs with Noé or Reina Maria.

"Do women become priests ever?"

"Sacramento! Women! It is a man's work, being a priest, though there are many holy women who serve God and the saints in con-

vents. Santa Barbara was such a one, and Santa Clara."

"What do they do?"

"They say prayers and do penance; also they do the work of the convent, and visit the sick."

"Is that all? Do they never go out?"

"There may be other matters requiring their attention, but I do not recall them. For the most part they pray."

"Do they never marry?"

"Santisima! They are the brides of the church."

"Nor have children?"

"Never!"

El Zarzo brooded over these things for a space, and Isidro settled himself for sleep.

"It is stupid, I think," said the boy, "to get married."

"Ah, no doubt you will come to think differently."

"You are not for marrying?"

"I am to be a priest." Isidro said his prayers and crossed himself; El Zarzo did the same;

it appeared he was a Christian, though somewhat lacking in instruction. The deep velvet void closed over them, blurred with stars; the coyotes were beginning their choruses.

Shepherds are a simple folk, slow of wit, little wondering, accustomed to mysteries. They have an affinity for sheep. Those who had the care of Mariano's flock came up with Isidro and the lad about mid-morning. It is doubtful if Nicolas and Ramon understood their part in the affair, but they made no objection. Here were sheep of Mariano's lacking a shepherd, and shepherds of Mariano's hiring. They met and mingled as of duty bound. Further than that the matter furnished them material for days' thought and night talks by many a coyote-scaring fire. The adventure of Noé and Reina Maria passed into the Iliad of the hills. By the week's end Nicolas and Ramon, who had traversed the length and breadth of the affair, concluded that they should go and look for Mariano.

Isidro and El Zarzo, once they had done with them, struck across the valley for the outposts of the Santa Lucia. On leaving Las Plumas it had

been the purpose of Escobar to drop into the public road at the Mission San Antonio de Padua de Los Robles. From there he could reach San Carlos in a day's riding. This business of Noé and Reina Maria had set all his plans awry. He was now out of his own riding and all at sea. El Zarzo, who knew the land like an Indian, led him a sharp pace. They rode hard, made a hunter's camp that night, and slept the clock around on stacked dried grass.

From that the directions for the way were plain enough: keep to the trail as long as it ran west, where it broke and wavered in stony ground cut straight over the hill crest. It did not matter greatly how; take the easiest going and keep a certain bulk of blue hill always to the left. So you came to a valley with a river; the ford was by the road house; the rest was open highway. Isidro rose early, slipped a silver piece under the shepherd lad's serape, and gave him a friendly pat. The boy breathed lightly in sleep.

The way was long, and Escobar struck out with a light heart. Lilac and laurel bloom brushed

his saddle-bow and at times engulfed him. The Santa Lucia rose up, blue and sparsely wooded slopes; seaward on those high and lonely altars bloomed the tall spike of yucca, called the Candles of our Lord. He pricked forward singing. The wood was very still. It came upon him once or twice that something moved behind him in the trail. Twigs snapped; a stone rolled clattering to some leafy deep. His horse grew restless, cocked an ear back upon the path. It might be deer or bear. Too noisy for one, Isidro judged, too still for the other. His horse whinnied and halted. Wild horses, no doubt, or an Indian riding at random in the scrub. He had come to the end of his trail and was forced to pick his way. Once in the pauses of this business he heard the clank of bridle bit, but nothing came up with him. By this he became sure he was followed. Little hints of sound, a pricking between his shoulders, the unease of his horse, kept him on the alert. Covering the rise of the hill, he looked back to see the scrub moving where a horse, led by his rider, came after him. His own horse saw and whinnied; the led horse

answered. Then began a conversation between those two; it seemed of friendly import, but conveyed no information to the rider. Isidro cleared an open space at a gallop, backed under a hanging rock, and waited.

It was by this time noon, hot and dim; a bank of white cloud hung low in the west above the sea; purple haze lay like a web along the scrub. No birds broke silence but the telltale jays. Isidro could hear the horse slowly breaking his way up the steep. Since the rider had dismounted Isidro could make nothing of him until he came full into the cleared space before him. It was El Zarzo. He must have expected to come up with Isidro hereabout, for he gave neither start nor sign when the other hailed him. Said he, —

"How goes the trail, señor?"

"My faith, lad, you gave me a turn. Where go you?"

"I, señor? I go to the Presidio of Monterey in your company." The lad was imperturbably impudent.

"Caramba! I cannot take you; it is ridiculous! What will the old man say?"

"That you are very discourteous, since I have guided you so far, and you refuse me the same."

"Eh, it can prick, this Briar," said Isidro. "Did he bid you follow me?"

El Zarzo looked calmly out across the lilac bloom. "It grows late," he said.

Isidro became grave.

"Think, lad, there is no friend there to do you a kindness. As for me, I know not how I shall fare where I go, nor how long remain."

"There have been few to do me kindness, that I should look for it."

"Your father" —

"He is not my father."

"I refuse to take you."

"The trail is free, señor." The lad breathed deeply and his face was troubled, but he was not to be shaken.

"Peste!" cried Isidro. He wheeled his horse about, and made off at a keen pace; his mount was of good blood, and proved the mettle of his pasture, but the hill pony had the lighter load. He was never a full cry behind. On a stony

slope, Isidro, doubling on his trail, came once face to face with him.

"Boy, boy!" he cried, "do you know what you do?"

"I go to Monterey, señor."

Isidro unbent suddenly with laughter.

"So," he said; "we will go better in company." They struck into the valley presently, and jogged on comfortably side by side.

VII

THE ROAD TO CARMELO

THE riders were now upon the main ridge of the coastwise hills; from this vantage they saw the land slope, by terraces unevenly wooded, to the floor of the valley where the Salinas ran. Here was a sag in the ridge that gave easy passage. North and south the range showed brokenly; west, the valley rolled up into blunt rounded hills; beyond them lay the sea. They watched the shift and play of light above it all day long. Between the trees on the slope the scrub was thick and close; all the gullies were choked with the waste of years. There were deer here, but no antelope; even at this distance they could make out a number of bears feeding on mast under the wide oaks. The riders steered by the road house that made a white speck by the river; an hour later they heard the singing of the ford.

They had shrewd shift crossing, for the river ran full and swift; the horses had to swim for it. The Escobar finery was hardly so fine by now. They slept early at the road house, where the lad passed for a servant, and lay at Isidro's feet; dawn end saw them riding forward in a weeping fog, saddle weary, but very good company. Isidro turned questioner in his turn; the lad told him freely of himself and his way of life. That was not much; he stuck to it that his mother was an Indian, a Cahuiallas; Peter Lebecque no kin of his, — "my mother's man," he said. Their life was all of the hills, hunting and trapping, following the shifting of wild creatures for their food and housing. They had never gone into the settlements; it seemed there was some obscure reason for this. Isidro made a shrewd guess that the woman might have been enticed away from one of the Missions, and was wary of a forced return. The lad had seen only Indians, vaqueros, and some such wayfarer as Escobar. It had been a rough life, but he showed no roughness; he had been servilely bred, but used no servility.

Of his errand at the Presidio of Monterey, if

errand he had, he would say nothing. He showed Isidro a package of coin, curious concerning the value and use of it, avowing that he had it from Peter Lebecque; upon which the young man made sure the trapper had sent him, but he gave over trying to probe that affair.

"Keep your own secret, lad," he said good-humoredly. "But you are young to be seeking your fortune in this fashion. Where will you go in Monterey?"

"Ah, with you, señor," breathed the lad, with something quick and wistful in his eyes. Isidro laughed. Priest or no priest, he had a good deal of the zest of life in him; the sense of companionship quickened it. If the lad took kindly to him, it was no more than the kindness he showed to the lad. By Our Lady, they would see something of the world, even out of a cassock. Their blood sang to a pretty tune; they rode forward merrily. By noon they saw below them the chimes in the east tower of Carmelo. They saw the sea, and, that being new to them, stayed rein to snuff the wind of it like a strong wine of excitement. Riding into the Mission grounds Isidro grew grave.

"Look now," he said, "here is the end of my going at my own will. I shall find the Padre Presidente here or at Monterey and give myself into his hands. Whatever I am able to do for you, that I will do, but you must be obedient in all things; so you will win the Padre's good will, and in any private concern I will bespeak you fairly. More I cannot promise. Here let us rest."

By a brook under an oak Isidro braided his hair and set his dress in order. They fell in with a band of neophytes going to dinner from a meadow where they had been marking calves. The Indians had stripped to the work, but they had each a shirt which they put on as they went. They wore little else, — a loin cloth and a strip of kerchief about the brows. Some of them had protected their legs with strips of hide wound about and about.

A great body of white cloud brooded over the land; the shadow of it dappled the hills. A wind came up from the sea and brought the breath of orchard bloom. The neophytes fell into lines two and two; another band came in from the fields and streamed alongside them. They raised

a crooning chant, timing their feet as they went. The bell cried noon from the tower.

The Father President came out of the church, and Isidro knelt to receive his blessing. At the meal which followed he was made acquainted with the resident Padres, — Pablo Gomez and Ignacio Salazar, — and with Fray Demetrio.

It was a very comfortable meal, — soup with force-meat balls, chicken, beef dressed with peppers, a dish of spiced pumpkin, another of fried beans, fine flour cakes, and light sour wine of the Mission's own making. An Indian servitor stood at the Father President's back; the napery was white and fine. Isidro gave the news of Las Plumas, the progress of his father's malady, the tale of the flocks, the growth of the vine cuttings Father Saavedra had sent the year before; but of his journey, of the incident of the Indian under the oak, of Noé and Reina Maria he said nothing; these were matters too small for the Father President's ear. Neither did Saavedra say anything of his schemes, nor what he would advise for the young man; the time was not ripe.

They walked out afterward in the pleasant air.

The neophytes were getting back to their work, children lay asleep, and women sat spinning and weaving in the sun. The Mission San Carlos Borromeo stands on an elevation, its buildings inclosing an imposing square. On the north side the church, which was built in a single aisle, reared its two towers, brooding above the first foundation of Junípero Serra, el Capella de los Dolores. Adjoining the church were the cloisters of the priests, opening into the long dining-room ; beyond that the kitchen. The store-rooms, shops, smithy, the quarters of the major-domo, and the huts of the neophytes made up the four sides of the quadrangle, in the midst of which stood the whipping-post and stocks. All the walls were of adobe, whitewashed, shining in the sun ; all the roofs of tile, brick red ; all the floors, except that of the church, of stamped earth, swept daily. Two bells hung in the west tower, three in the east, reached by an outside stair. One was rung for meals, for rising, for beginning and quitting work. For the offices of Holy Church they rang the chimes. So Padre Vicente explained to young Escobar.

Very pleasantly, very much at ease in the golden afternoon, they went from storehouse to smithy, from chapel to orchard. They saw the rows of huts of the married neophytes, orderly and four square like a village street; saw the carved Christ above the high altar flanked by the patron of the Mission, and San Antonio with the Child. They said a prayer by the bones of Serra, and bowed before the Stations of the Cross. Then they went out into the quadrangle to see a man flogged for stealing a hen.

The fellow had fifteen lashes, and bore them stolidly, putting on his shirt again with the greatest good-humor; doubtless he thought the dinner worth it. Isidro looked out to sea; he felt a little queasily at the sound of blows, and so missed the point of the Padre's observation on the Church's duty of rendering spiritual relief according to the fault. At Las Plumas they had Indian servants who did about as pleased them, except when the old Don was in a passion, and threw things at them. If the women misbehaved, their husbands dealt with them in a homely fashion, but they never called it spiritual relief.

Isidro had a moment of doubting if he should really make a good priest.

He walked after that for a space with Saavedra in the Mission garden, where young fruit was setting on the trees, and the vines blossoming. The Padre showed him some experiments in horticulture newly under way, grafting of delicate fruits on wild stock. They flourished hardily. "So," said the Father President, "is the vine of Christian grace engrafted on this root of savagery, fruitful unto salvation."

Isidro was not thinking of souls just then. He was suddenly smit with a sense of the material competency of the Brotherhood of St. Francis. He remembered his life in old Mexico with his mother, where all his thoughts of the priesthood had gathered about the cathedral and the altar services. Now it occurred to him that to be a good priest in this new land one must first be a better man. It was not by blinking the works that men do that the Padres had established themselves among the heathen, but by doing them, — making themselves masons, builders, artists, horticulturists; dealing with sheep-scab,

weeds, alkaline soil, and evil beasts. It appeared that God was also served by these things. This prompted him to put some question to the Father President concerning the disposition of himself. Saavedra responded with an invitation to Isidro to make with him the round of the missions of Alta California, which progress should begin within a fortnight. The proposal fell in with the young man's mood of adventure. The Father President and Escobar began to be well pleased with each other.

Returned to the Mission buildings the Padre found work cut out for him ; a poor soul wanting the mercy of the Church. Padre Salazar was at a bedside in Monterey, Padre Gomez in the meadow of oaks overseeing the counting of calves ; the Father President himself went into the confessional. Outside they heard the evening bustle of the Mission as of a very considerable town, — children crying, dogs barking, and the laughter of young girls. Men gathered in from the farthest fields ; the smell of cooking rose and mixed with the smell of the orchard and the sea. It was the hour for evening service, and an altar

ministrant crept up to snuff the tall candles that burned before San Antonio with the Child. The ringers in the belfry shook the chimes; a veil of fog came up and hid the sea.

The poor soul at the confessional rocked sidewise uneasily upon his knees; not much account to look at, a shepherd by his dress, young, low-browed, dark, with dirty, fidging fingers, a fresh cut upon his face running into the unshaven jaw. Most plainly of all he was in the grip of grief or terror too large for his shallow holding, that marred his smartness as the bubbling of pitch fouls the pot. The penitent's tale ran on, mumbled, eager, with many a missed word painstakingly recovered: "I accuse myself of the sin of envy — of drunkenness, of neglect of holy ordinances" — various sins of omission and commission. All this was merely perfunctory; counter to it ran the deep mutter of the priest, "What more, my son, what more?" At last it was all out, — envy and drunkenness and hate, ending in a slain man lying out on a pleasant heath with his mouth to the earth and blue flies drinking his blood.

All judgments are mixed. Padre Saavedra might have bidden the man surrender to the civil authorities, but he thought perhaps the civil authorities claimed too much, and there are better uses to put a man to than execution. Besides, here was a reasonable doubt as to the degree of criminality; both men were drunken, one of them had suffered grievance, — without conscious fraud Ruiz had put that forward, — and no knowing whose had been the first provocation. Whatever Mariano's share in it, and the confessor judged it must have been considerable, he was now gone out of the Padre's jurisdiction. Perhaps he had known the Portuguese without finding in the knowledge any warrant for holding him blameless. Was it fair, then, that the other should bear the brunt of punishment?

"Is there any circumstance known to you," he had asked Ruiz, "by which it is possible that any other should come to suffer for the evil you have done?"

"None, none," protested the poor herder.

"But should any arise" —

"Ah, Padre, Padre," interrupted the penitent,

"I am a poor man, and of but small account. Give me ease for my conscience, and if it should come to pass that any be falsely accused or suffer because of me, I am in your hands. Do you but come after me, Padre, and I shall make all things plain."

Ruiz had not much imagination. This was a safe promise, he thought, for once freed of blood-guiltiness he could not conceive how it should come up to trouble him again.

There was an art once of making cups so that if but clearest water was poured in them it became medicated, turgid, or hurtful, with the properties of the vessel; so, often, the saintliest soul takes a color from its human holding. Did the Padre, flinching a little at the abasement of his divinely derived authority before the encroachments of the state, and leaning always toward mercy for the sake of this simple people from whom he might yet be torn, appease himself with the secret exercise of priestly powers? At any rate, he made the shepherd an obligation of prayers and alms, masses said for the murdered man, no more drunkenness. This was

hard, and, moreover, he should go back and bury the dead decently out of sight. This was harder, but here was no family to compensate, no restitution of stolen goods to make. What else? Then he made inquiry where the place of the unblest grave might be found, for he had it in mind to pass by it in his itinerary and do what lay within his holy office for the sake of the murdered man. And having concluded these things he gave Ruiz release.

"Go in peace, my son, and may the God of Peace go with thee. *Absolvo te.*" The penitent crept out into the dark with a mingled expression of cunning and relief.

Indians gathered in to the evening service; the candles glowed on the high altar. Isidro went in with the others. He had not attended service in a church since he had been a child in old Mexico; the recollection came back dimly, and with it a memory of his mother. He remembered why he was here and what it purported. The smell of incense and candle smoke, the rising and falling of the bent worshipers as they followed the ritual, the mellow droning voices

lifted his soul above the sense of time and things. He saw the saints in Paradise and souls in Purgatory; sweat broke out upon him; a great panting shook his heart; he was taken with the hunger of souls. There was no doubt about it that Isidro would make an excellent priest. Toward the end of the service, a little wearied of his own fervor and the hardness of the floor, his eyes strayed to the lad Zarzo, who watched him from his station under the choir. He met two great eyes of burning and amazement, a hint of wonder, and along with it something of the dumb brute's envy of the man. A wave of kindness overtook the young man. It occurred to him that although the lad was plainly a Christian there remained much that might be done for his soul's good.

VIII

MASCADO

ISIDRO judged himself done with the business of Juan Ruiz and his sheep, but, in fact, he was not yet to see the end. The night that Escobar supped with the Father President at San Carlos, Peter Lebecque had also a guest. He came at dusk, lighting down from his horse, — a newly caught wild bronco of the hills in a rawhide halter. He came as one accustomed to that hostel, and gave no greeting. The old trapper silently made additions to his evening meal; the dogs came one by one and put their noses to the newcomer in recognition. He was, no doubt, an Indian, but owning a lighter strain, a skin less swart, a mould less stocky, a hint of hotter, swifter thought. Except for the loin cloth he was naked; his blanket, folded, served him for a saddle; around his neck in a deerskin sheath hung a knife; around his brows the inevitable

bright bandeau of woven stuff, — the knotted ends, fringed with abalone shell, hung down and mingled with his hair. His breast was black with bruises and scars of half-healed cuts.

"Where from, Mascado?" said Lebecque.

"Los Tulares; the elk shift their feeding-ground from the lake to the river; the young are dropped early this year." So he gave the news of the road, — three hundred calves branded at Las Plumas, Red Baptiste slain by a bear, a feud between the Obehebes and Chio's following. Lebecque answered with the tale of his traps and pelts. All this was made talk, while the renegade's eyes kept a-roving, up the swale, along the creek, in the alleys of shade under the grapevines; his ears appeared to prick a little like a dog's at noises. Lebecque leered at his cooking pots with his back to his guest, his mouth screwed in a fit of obscene mirth.

"Eat," he said at last, when all was done; but no talk interfered with that business. After food, drink. Lebecque fished up a bottle from some crypt under the vines; with drink, talking.

"Eh, Mascado, wine is good!" cried the trap-

per. "Drink, Mascado; drink deep. Another cup?" The old rascal's tongue had got wagging at last. "Drink, Mascado; El Zarzo will not come. You are looking for him? You have something to say to him? Well, you will have to say it to me, Mascado; it will be long before you see him again. Drink, Mascado."

The Indian took another cup to beat down the embarrassment that threatened to rise and flood him.

"Where is she?" he said.

"Where? How should I know? Who keeps the trail of a flown bird? Ah, Mascado, you are too late; the Briar has bloomed in your absence, and another man has plucked the rose."

The Indian's lids narrowed.

"Speak straight, Lebecque."

The old trapper began to sigh and wag his head prodigiously.

"Ah, the women, Mascado; they are all of a piece; you think you have known them all your life, you think you have them; comes a fine sprig of a caballero and gives them the tail of his eye, off they go."

The Indian struck the table with his hand until the bottle jumped.

"Where is she?" he said again.

"Where? At Monterey, I think. It is a very pleasant town, I have heard, a gay town. Eh, Mascado? If you should go there, Mascado, you could tell me how my Briar blooms in the sea air." He leaned his arms on the table and shook with chuckling. The Indian was a renegade from the Mission San Carlos; if he so much as put his nose in that direction he smelt the whipping-post.

"Have you let her go, Lebecque, have you let her go?"

"Ah, what is an old fellow like me to a fine young gentleman in velvet? Velvet smallclothes, Mascado, with silver trimmings. You see, Mascado, I am old; my face is not good to me; I have no fine garments, no silver, no lace, no manners. Ah, ah, what could I do?" The old villain's allusions were pointed each with a leer; his shoulders shook. "Why, now, Mascado, you take it hard. My word, you are quite excited over it. So am I; see how my hand shakes."

(So it did, with indecent mirth.) "Take a drink, Mascado; it will do you good."

Said Mascado, "When?"

"Ah, a matter of two or three days ago, quite three days ago. They will be in Monterey by now. More wine, Mascado? Wine is good against grief, and you are plainly grieved, Mascado. So am I."

There was something keen in the old man's feeling of the situation, something earnest in the dry sobs of laughter, something hidden that stung, something open that was meant to soothe; the Indian sat fuming, but uncertain.

"I have watched, Mascado; the old man has eyes. I have seen the thought grow in you; you would have set my Briar to grow in your own door, Mascado, and now she has gone. He was a very fine gentleman, a very good family, and rich, Mascado, very rich."

The Indian sprang to his feet. "A fine gentleman, say you? Was he smooth and young? Had he an eye like a bird's? Had he a bay horse with one white fore foot and a long scar on his belly? Ah, ah!" The man twisted and shook

like an eel in a spit; his eyes stood out; his words choked him. He shook his knife; he was plainly in a great fume, and something warred with his rage to beat it down.

"A fine gentleman, ha! All in black with silver, and a way with him that said, 'You are the dust under my feet, therefore expect no harm of me.' Ah, I know him."

Lebecque pricked up his ears.

"If you know him I doubt you know nothing good." Again the Indian shook like a candle in a gust. "And if you know him, Mascado, you can perhaps tell me how he came by the flock and the dogs of Juan Ruiz."

"This day week," said Mascado, "Juan Ruiz fed the flock at the Mesa Buena Vista; he had with him Noé and Reina Maria. I have not seen him since." It was plain he had no notion how this should concern him.

"Three days ago," said Lebecque, "this caballero came to my house, here at the Grapevine, at sundown. He rode a bay horse with a white fore foot; I did not notice the scar. He was driving the flock of Mariano the Portuguese. I knew the

brand, and by the dogs that were with him I knew the flock for that one kept by Juan Ruiz. The dogs were plainly fagged; Noé had the marks of teeth on him."

"Said he anything for himself?"

"Why, that he had found them at the head of Oak Creek by the ford, and no sign of the shepherd. A likely tale, think you, Mascado? For look now, the flock had not been frightened, — that was plain, — nor diminished since I saw it, and that in a land where the coyotes are like cattle for numbers, and the bears carry off the sheep from under the shepherd's eyes. And look you again, — this young man washed before meat, and there was blood on his hands and on his ruffles. I saw it; blood, Mascado."

The half-breed's lips curled backward from his teeth, his breath came whistling.

"Which way came he?"

"By Deer Spring, where we killed the big buck. He came on Zarzito suddenly in mid-afternoon, and professed not to know whose sheep he had."

"Which way went he?"

"Toward Pastería, to bring the flock to Mari-

ano's men. Maybe; maybe not. What should an Escobar care for a stray flock? Foul work, Mascado."

"Ay, foul." The mestizo ran over with curses that made the flesh creep. Lebecque pushed over the bottle.

"Cursing is dry work," he said; "what would you do?"

"That!" Mascado whipped his knife into the table until the tempered blade rapped the handle on the boards.

"They are not your sheep, Mascado, nor your shepherd."

"There is Zarzito," said the Indian.

Lebecque sniggered. "Neither is that yours, oh, my friend."

For all answer Mascado struck his blade into the table again.

"Ah, put up your knife; he has pistols, big and silver-handled; he is a fine gentleman, I tell you."

"Fine gentlemen have throats."

"Put up your knife, I say. He is in Monterey; the rose is plucked. Drink, Mascado."

The night wore, the fire dropped flickering on the hearth, the candle guttered; Lebecque drained the bottle, drained himself dry of rascally wit, and stumbled off to drunken slumber. The Indian sat at the table ever of two minds, blown hot and cold. He sheathed his blade and unsheathed it; his muscles flexed and heaved; rage shuddered in him, and went out. The dying fire touched the high glistening curves of his body, and made moving shadows on his face. The fire snapped and went out. Dark lapped up about him; the little candle made an island of light for his face to shine in; it lit his high cheek bones, glimmered on the shell fringes of his kerchief, on the whetted blade. The candle guttered and went out.

Waking late, Lebecque found himself alone. "Eh, eh," he grunted, "let him go. It will not be to Monterey, I warrant. The good Padres have a rod in pickle. The swine! He would have the Briar to bloom by his wickiup, would he? The wild hawk would mate with the dove. And he thought Lebecque would give him his blessing? Eh, let him go; I have served

him well." So he grumbled over his morning meal.

Mascado had not gone to Monterey. He had done what would serve his purpose better for that turn. He went about to pick up the trail of Isidro and the sheep. The rain that had fallen between times made it slow going, but he knew in the main where the trail should be. In the course of the morning he came to the ford of Oak Creek. Here the storm had fringed out to a passing shower that had scarcely penetrated the thick roof of leaves. He found the bones of the sheep that Isidro had killed, and the remains of the fire. From there the trail was sufficiently plain. He noted the vagueness and indecision of the sheep, the absence of night fires; saw the broken flower tops and the bent grass where Noé and Reina Maria had settled their duty to the flock. But one thing he missed, — that was the trail of Juan Ruiz, for it lay in thick grass, and was a week old. He knew where the flock should have been, and judging from his encounter with Escobar under the oaks, knew where he should have passed it. He pressed on after the trail of the

sheep. This brought him in time to the Mesa Buena Vista, and the body of Mariano.

One must believe here that the mestizo's rage had put him at fault, since the truth, if he had known it, would have served his purpose quite as well. He knew Juan Ruiz very little, and Mariano not at all. The body had lain out a week of warm wet weather, and, besides, the coyotes had been at it. He made out a knife wound or two, and the evidences of a struggle. Some prompting of humanity or superstition, a remnant of his Mission training, led him to gouge out a shallow grave with a knife and a stick. When he had pressed the earth upon it he started forthwith for the Presidio of Monterey. He reached there the third day, looked about, failed to find what he sought. Then he went to San Carlos.

Once a neophyte always a neophyte, was the rule of the Padres. It had been two years since Mascado had left the Mission without leave, and for the second time. The corporal of the guard had brought him back the first time. Mascado and the whipping-post kept a remembrance between them of that return. But now he chose his

time. It was Sunday, at the hour of morning service. There was no one left outside the church. Mascado went and stood in the nave with unbent and unrepentant head; he stood still and heard the blessed mutter of the mass for the space of a Pater Noster. By that time he had seen all that he wished; but he had also been seen and recognized by Padre Pablo, by half-a-dozen neophytes, and by the servant of Isidro Escobar.

IX

IN WHICH NOTHING IN PARTICULAR HAPPENS

THE time neared when the Father President should begin his annual progress through the missions of Alta California; the rainy season drew to a close; the planted fields were flourishing, the cattle fat. Upon this journey he was to discover to Escobar the true glory of the Franciscan foundations, to send him off to Mexico primed with ghostly enthusiasm for the work which God in His wisdom permitted to be threatened by the temporal powers. But before that there were some lesser matters.

There was this affair of the Comandante's, concerning which he must be better informed. Castro would be sending for him at all hours to consult upon some new conjecture which he had formed. There was, also, the affair of the renegade Mascado, who had been recognized at

church the Sunday before. Such contumacy, such slighting of authority, must indubitably provoke a spirit of irreverence in the neophytes if not promptly brought to punishment. They should have Mascado back and flogged within a week, even though Saavedra must ask for a detail from the Presidio to fetch him. To be frank, the forcible detention of neophytes by the Padres met with scant countenance from the civil authorities, and at this time less than ever. The Father President felt he could ill afford to strain the relations between himself and the state, still less to let the offense of Mascado go unnoticed.

In the end he got a corporal and two men to go with the privates attached to the Mission; the Comandante's own need of help made him kindly disposed. The expedition was dispatched to the south, since Mascado was reported to have been seen in that direction. For that reason they should have gone in almost any other. At the moment of the soldiers' departing Mascado lay within sound of the sea, in cover of a spaley oak wedged in a pit of dunes, known and comforted by several of the neophytes.

Isidro had a private matter which could be best attended to at this time. Out of the bowels of great mercy, and for the greater ease of souls, His Holiness Pope Pius VII had endowed the Church of the Holy Cross at Santa Cruz with this exceeding grace, — that every mass said there for the space of one hundred years would loose the soul in whose interest it was said from the pains of Purgatory. Isidro was to assist at masses there for his mother's sake, and if so be she did not need them they were to go to the credit of Don Antonio, who had doubtless the longer account. To Santa Cruz, therefore, went Escobar, and with him went the lad Zarzito, who would answer to no Christian name, to the great scandal of Padres Gomez and Salazar. He had attached himself to Escobar, in the character of a privileged dependent, and as such, largely for his soul's sake, had won the promise of accompanying him on the pilgrimage. The two had become great friends by now. What a youth needs to smack the full savor of new times and adventures is the company of another youth. It had been seven years since Isidro had seen a larger

town than Monterey, and Zarzito never at all. There was not enough difference of schooling between them to render one unsuited to the other's mind, just enough difference of caste to leave no question who should lead.

It was very pleasant weather to take the road in; the way led between the burnt splendor of the poppies and the freshness of the sea, — and made one day's riding from Monterey. The last mass celebrated at the Church of the Holy Cross, so the Padre had told them, had been said for the soul of a murdered man. Isidro heard the masses very devoutly, and in the interim watched the slaughter of a thousand cattle, the hides and tallow of which had been bargained for by a Yankee trading schooner lying off-shore. It was Monday when they set out, and Friday found them back at Carmelo. Still the Father President lingered over his preparations, waiting for tardy instructions from his college, fencing with the civil powers over small matters of privilege. Isidro found time to look about him, and put in motion the work of kindness which he purposed toward Peter Lebecque's wild lad.

He had had occasion to begin it on the first night of their stay at the Mission. The retiring bell had rung, and of the night bustle remained only the shuffle of feet across the quadrangle. Isidro lingered in the corridor in late courtesy with the Father President, watching the neophytes to their quarters. It was a general rule of all missions that the unmarried men and unmarried women should sleep each in separate buildings — *monoferos* — provided for that purpose, to which only an upper servant had the key. Doubtless the good Padres had reason. The married people slept in their huts and the young children with them. On this evening, about the time when there should have been a cessation of all noises, there came a sound of struggle and protestation. It edged across the patio from the direction of the *monofero*, and involved the voices of Padre Pablo, Fray Demetrio, and the Briar. Fages had the latter by the collar, but the lad contrived to keep an arm's length between them.

"O abandoned! O apostate! Despiser of holy persons," began the secretary, pushing the

lad before him. Isidro cut him short. It seemed that the slight figure of the boy swayed a little in the direction of Escobar, as they came up, but the eyes were turned away. There was a kind of appeal that touched the young man in the very abnegation of all claim. Saavedra got the gist of the matter in a question or two. The boy had objected to being locked up for the night with the rest of the youths, and had registered his objections on the person of Fray Demetrio.

"Let him lie at my door," said Escobar; "he is a good lad."

"Who is he?" asked Saavedra.

"I had him from Peter Lebecque in the Cañada de las Uvas. His mother was a Cahuiallas, so he says. He is not of the missions."

"Is he a Christian?"

"That I'll warrant he is not," cried Fages, thinking of his bruises. But the boy protested; his mother had always said — "And, besides, there was a token." He wrenched himself free of the secretary, and fumbling at his neck, drew out something on a cord, which he held toward them in a manner indicating that he would not

have it touched. Padre Vicente came forward to peer at it in the candle flare; at sight of it he crossed himself devoutly; so did the others.

"A most holy token," said the Father President. "How came you by it?"

"My mother said it was a token of my baptism."

"The medal of Our Lady of Seven Sorrows," said Saavedra. "I doubt there is another such in Alta California. Let him go with Señor Escobar; after all, he is but a lad, and, without doubt, a Christian, though somewhat ill instructed." It occurred to Isidro that he could not begin better than by remedying that matter. Zarzo put back his treasure in his bosom; it was plain to see his own respect for it had risen, observing the respect it won from the others. For that night, then, he slept in the corridor at Isidro Escobar's door. For the rest, he settled himself very well. It seemed he had come to an excellent understanding with a motherly soul among the Indian women, who had none of her own kin, and had quartered himself in her house.

"A most commendable woman," Padre Igna-

cio told Escobar; "one who has known great sorrows, and digested them to her soul's good. Ordinarily we do not expect the treasures of spiritual experience from these poor children of the wilderness, but Marta is something more than ordinary. Her father, in fact, was captain of the tribe, — a man of great influence in Serra's time, — and Marta has the gift of testimony. I myself have been often lifted up to hear her descant upon the mercies of God. She has a son, born out of wedlock, though I cannot think it due to her fault, but a most rebellious youth. Twice has he left the Mission without leave, to consort with the Children of Darkness; it is, in fact, he whom the Father President has dispatched the guard to seek. I doubt they find him, but Marta is a submissive soul. Mary grant that this lad prove a comfort to her."

He was a comfort, at least, to Isidro, who practiced upon him all the priestly airs which most people found to become him vastly. He also undertook the lad's instruction in the foundations of Christian faith and the lives of the saints, much of which he had gathered directly

from books of Saavedra's. Long mornings, after mass, the pair of them would climb the bell tower by the outer stair. There Isidro would sit with the sun on his body and the shadow of the belfry on his book; the sea airs made a soft whisper about the deep-mouthed chimes and heaped blown petals and pollen dust in the corners of the stairs. Whiles he would read in some old book, other whiles lift up his face to take in the lovely landscape like long sips of heartening wine; again he would read or relate monkish tales to the Briar, who, lounging on the steps below him, found nothing better worth looking at or listening to than Escobar. The lad heard him with that sidelong look of the eye which questions the tale but not the faith of the teller; but when they touched upon the visible workings of the Church they came to lively issue. Saavedra never entered upon any justification of the missions, — said, "Behold!" and considered the argument concluded. It was a manner not without weight upon the generality: so many Indians clothed, housed, and fed; such prodigious labors; so many baptized, instructed, ripe for the

garners of Paradise. Isidro was disposed to give the fact its due. Said Zarzito: —

"But why do they lock them up? Is God glorified because there is a roof between me and the sky? To the citizens of Monterey they do not so, and there is much goes on there that is not of the Church. And what have they got by serving God? Food in their bellies? Even so. I have seen wild Indians in the mountains. In the hills there is not always food enough, but often there is more and the pleasure of feasting. And look you, señor, here is a whipping-post, so if a man works not he is flogged; but in the forest if a man works not he goes empty, and that is the greater pain. They serve God, say you, for their souls' salvation. But my mother served God in the hills, and the priest who came after she died, — we would have had him before but the sickness was too quick, — the priest said she had of a surety seen salvation. And again, what is this talk that the missions will be taken away from the Padres? If that be so you will see what you will see; for now they are as the water of streams which are dammed, quiet as a

pond, but when the dam is taken away they go roaring all abroad. One I have seen, Mascado, bred in this place, him whom the Padres hunt; fifteen years he lived in this place, and is now in the hills more wild and cunning than any other. So will all these be."

It seemed that Isidro was likely to get other views of the policy of the Franciscans than Saavedra intended.

In Monterey, also, where he met Delgado, and felt for him that anticipatory thrill by which nature warns men that they are about to be pitted against each other, he heard talk of another sort that set his wits stirring. Here the speech of young men was all of Liberty and the Republic. Liberty in the figure of a female finds easy worship among a people who count a woman chief among the Holy Family, and the new cult bred plots thicker than flies in August. There were clamors against the Governor because he was thought to favor the priestly power, counter clamors that he favored it not at all; people who contended that the removal of the missions from the cure of the Franciscans would put the com-

munity at the mercy of savage hordes; cross contentions that the Padres held their charges in a condition more ignoble than they might achieve for themselves. Copious reasons were not wanting for naming the Padres both saints and sinners, all of which Escobar heard. He had a way with him which made men always anxious to explain themselves, quite sure of his countenance once they had delivered the facts. First and last there was a good deal of light thrown on the situation of the Missions of Alta California; some time later Isidro found that it stood him in good stead. At this present the only use he made of it was to try the case over again with Zarzito. Isidro was one who, in order to get the pith of any subject, needed to express himself, and for full expression required an audience. The lad's part in it was chiefly to help the young man find out his own thought.

The pair had often much the same sort of companionship together that Isidro had at Las Plumas with his dog. Often, as he sat against the wall smoking in the sun, looking out over the hyacinthine slope when the smell of blos-

soming wild vines was sweet in the warm, abundant spring, the dog would come and lay his head upon his knees, and Isidro would stroke the silky ears and sense the joy of life deliciously, more poignant for the companionable touch. So he got a double portion of zest in his new surroundings, — his own and the boy's; but the Briar was not to be stroked, as became evident. Once, walking on the beach when a calling wind was on the sea and a tearing tide came in, for sheer delight of its wildness Isidro clapped him on the shoulder, and the shoulder slipped from under his hand as the wave under foot.

"No offense, lad," laughed Isidro.

"No offense taken, señor, but I like not to be clapped."

"Now by that token I know you for a true Indian; I am like to forget it else. You are as wary of touching as a wolf."

They trod with joy on the fringe of the incoming waves, and sniffed the wet, bracing wind.

"Oh, to be gone upon it!" cried Isidro. "South and south into Mexico. Shall you not miss me, lad, when I am gone?"

All the boy's spirit rushed into his eyes.

"No," he said.

"What?" cried Escobar.

El Zarzo looked flushed and mutinous.

"No," he said, "for I shall be upon the sea with you there."

"Why, what will you do?" said Escobar.

"What will you do, señor, there in Mexico?"

"I will serve God," said Isidro; and being an honest youth, he added, "I will also see the world."

"I also serve God and see the world," said El Zarzo; but the words were bolder than his eyes, — "serve God and you, señor." He had at times a certain quick and wistful air of depreciation, very engaging.

"Well spoken for an adventurous youth," laughed Isidro, and but for his late warning would have clapped him on the shoulder again.

X

THE ARREST

IF Padre Saavedra had been as wise in the ways of sinners as of saints he would never have sent his search party groping so far afield for the renegade neophyte, Mascado, who, having nothing to hope for from the clemency of the Padres, had not exposed himself at San Carlos without reason. The business that led him to brave the whipping-post would hold him in that neighborhood until it should be accomplished. His appearance in any quarter meant mischief; since nothing had happened it was safe to conclude him still within reach, as, in fact, he was, made comfortable by several of the Padre's flock. Neither had Peter Lebecque, who had a hand in that business, anticipated so much hardihood. As much as in him lay, the old trapper wished good to the wild Briar that had grown up beside his door,

but his love of provoking led him farther than he knew. Mascado, misled by the old Frenchman's ribaldry, believed that Escobar had done dishonorably what he, as much as he was able, meant to do openly, and with credit, as, indeed, the temper of gallantry at that time gave him warrant for believing. He was ignorant of Isidro's ignorance, and Lebecque thought it a point of humor to let him remain so. But Lebecque supposed by this time that Zarzito would be under the protection of the Father President, and in such case as to put an end to the Indian's coveting. Also he thought Mascado very much of a coward, and expected no such good joke as that he would really go up to Monterey to find where the truth of the matter lay. The young man's passion, though he sensed the fact of it, seemed to the trapper wholly ridiculous. But Mascado was minded to sift the affair, and this is what he found: first, the body of a slain man lying not far from the path of Escobar; then this fine gentleman with blood specks on his linen, giving himself priestly airs at San Carlos, where Zarzito passed for a servant and slept at

his door. Mascado made very sure of these things; he went into the church and saw the great eyes of El Zarzo, wistful and amazed, watching Escobar while he prayed, and wished for no further proof. After that he made his lair in the pitted oak, meditating vengeance. By night he sought food in his own fashion, and by day he sat among the dunes, and whetted his knife and his heart, wishing Isidro injury, but not able to compass it.

Escobar had done him a kindness, you will remember, under an oak in a certain open glade, but he had also done him a wrong. He had killed Juan Ruiz indubitably, and he had stolen Zarzito.

"Eh, he would have a Briar, would he? Well, here was one that would prick;" he stuck his knife furiously into the tree. His rage was great, but his passion overrode it; but still — Zarzito — to have her — to hold, to keep — rifled, despoiled, — but still to have her! Dimly it grew in his mind that when he had become a little less afraid of her, when use had dulled a little the edge of his desire, he might take it out of her, — might repay himself in her pangs for this keen

tooth of injury. Perhaps in time he might beat her, but now he knew if she so much as noticed him it sent his wits all abroad. Body of her he would have though Escobar had her soul, — and Escobar had unquestionably saved his life; so he sat and fumed.

Meanwhile, Isidro and Zarzito had been to Santa Cruz and back, Father Saavedra had dispatched his search party on the renegade's trail, — for that purpose Mascado had openly left a trail, — and Don Valentin had come to an understanding with the Comandante. He had gone south by the coasting schooner, Jesús Maria, at Castro's cost, to find Padre Bonaventura and bring back the heir of the Ramirez; to marry her if she proved marriageable. Delgado admitted to himself that the condition allowed a good deal of latitude. Finally, the day was set for the departure of the Father President.

About this time, Ramon, shepherd to Mariano the Portuguese, came fumbling up from Pastería with a great tale for the alcalde of Monterey. Mascado, threading catlike between the pine boles behind the town, came upon him camped over a

tiny winking fire at the end of his day's trudge, and gave him a wayfarer's hail. They two had supped by the same fire before now. Ramon, who was full of his tale, and, barring the gift of speech, more simple than his own dogs, unburdened himself. It was well that he had found stuff to practice his maunderings upon, otherwise the alcalde would have gotten a sorry tangle. Under Mascado's guidance he got it fairly into shape.

It seemed that while he, Ramon, and Nicolas kept Mariano's sheep in the northern end of Pastería, sometimes called Angustora, a fortnight since, there had come riding a fine caballero, and that thin lad of Lebecque's, him with the married brows and pricking tongue, having in charge the flock and the dogs of Juan Ruiz. And the caballero — yes, an Escobar; so the lad named him — had told a most strange story of finding the sheep of Ruiz, but no Ruiz, at the ford of Oak Creek. The flock was whole, but the dogs looked to have been at each other's throats. The Señor Escobar had passed on toward Monterey. "And after," said Ramon, "we went with the

sheep to look for Ruiz; it was slow going, for the trail was cold." Here Mascado might have helped him, but he chose rather to hear the end. "But this was most strange; Señor Escobar told that he found the flock at Oak Creek, but *we* found Ruiz at the Mesa Buena Vista in a new dug grave. Yes, we uncovered enough to see that it was a man; the coyotes had been at it. And look you, Mascado, whatever was done evilly was done at that place; so thinks Nicolas, so think I; for Noé here," — he touched the dog at his feet, — "Noé, when we came towards that place, when we were no more than at the borders of the Mesa Buena Vista, made so great a howling that the hair of our flesh stood up. And Nicolas thinks, and so think I, that whatever was done there the dogs were witness of it." The man's voice fell off to a whisper; he edged a little away from Noé, making the sign of the cross surreptitiously. "And when we came to the grave, — it was but poorly dug with a knife, as if one had come back hastily with fear upon him to cover it up, — when we came to that place, I say, Noé here left minding the flock, and went

whining in his throat, so that we fell a-praying just to hear it. And there is more. When we went about with the flock to bring them towards the place of The Reed, at the edge of the mesa we came upon a track of a horseman riding, such a track as might have been made by the caballero who brought us the sheep at Pastería; and the dogs, when they had found it, made as if to be pleased. Eh, what make you of that, Mascado?"

Mascado made murder of it, and smacked the word as if it had a fine savor. Still there was more. The shepherds, it appeared, had taken thought to carry their news to Mariano, but when they came by the place of The Reed they found the door of the house open, and rabbits running in and out. Worse, they found the box at the bed's head broken open and not a real left in it, not a real. Mascado shrugged away a suspicion of denial that lingered in the other's voice; that Mariano had been robbed was very much to his purpose, — by whom, not so much.

"To the alcalde!" he cried, shaking with an evil joy; "to the alcalde; the caballero shall

swing for it! These will be witnesses, you and Nicolas, Peter Lebecque and I."

"And the boy," said Ramon.

Mascado thought not. "We are four men," he said. "What do we want of the boy?"

The morning of the day that was to see the Father President started on his journey there was high mass at the Mission San Carlos. Within the church was a flare of color like a trumpet burst. Sheaves of poppies, last of the spring splendor, burned under the Stations of the Cross; el Capella de los Dolores glowed like a forge; wisps of incense smoke floated before the high altar like fog across the sun. All San Carlos huddled in the aisle. The candle lights of the high altar glimmered on the bare bronze skin of the worshipers. The eyes of most burned with a sombre fire. Isidro was beginning the practice of his priestly vocation by serving at mass. Saavedra himself officiated, glowing, like the Host, with a fervor of devotion. It passed over the kneeling horde, reached the acolyte and wrapt him as a flame. El Zarzo stood in the

bell tower with the ringers, who made the sign of the cross with the ropes as they rang the chimes.

There went a little flicker of curiosity over the congregation toward the middle of the Introit, when the alcalde of Monterey, with two officers of the constabulary, came well forward into the body of the church and knelt among the neophytes. Isidro felt their presence a check upon his devotion; the Father President made a motion of unease, but it passed; he was too full of his holy office. His voice streamed upward in a ghostly triumph, wavered into tenderness, turned upon the note of fatherliness into the deep wrack of a purely human concern, rose again through faith, and carried the hearts of his people to the barred door of Heaven itself.

"Lord have mercy on us!"

"Christ have mercy on us!"

The wail of the people beat upon it in an agony of entreatment; almost the door gave back. The naked souls of his cure, accustomed to the self-hypnotism of their own wild immemorial chants, missed no point of the spiritual

exaltation. The people bowed, rose, and bowed again at the Elevation of the Host; the chimes rang in the tower. The smoke of incense passed, the murmur of devotion fell off into the rustle of departing, the people came blinking out into the sun, last of all Isidro and Saavedra, stripped of their vestments and spent with spiritual passion. The alcalde, lingering by the great oaken doors, came up to them; there was bowing and a display of manners. But the alcalde had a taste for dramatics; the moment was propitious. He waved up his deputies and disposed them on either side of the young man with a gesture.

"Señor Escobar," said he, "I have the exceeding regret to inform you that you are arrested for the murder of Juan Ruiz." He might have managed differently, but, in fact, the alcalde was a little big man and a stickler for the Republic; he suspected the Padre Presidente of an intention to cry down his authority. To come into the Padre's own jurisdiction and carry away his acolyte almost from the steps of the altar was a vindication of the civil right.

"GO IN PEACE, MY SON"

The blow was a shrewd one; you could see horror and amazement widening in the faces of the bystanders as a circle widens on the surface of a smitten pool. Isidro was simply puzzled and dumb. Saavedra rallied first. He fetched up a tolerable smile.

"A mistake, Señor Alcalde," he said, "most annoying and yet almost laughable, but wholly a mistake. Juan Ruiz is not dead." And then his smile slipped from him and left his mouth stretched and gray. The pallor reached his eyes, his tongue curled dryly in his open mouth, for he remembered what he knew of Juan Ruiz and how he knew it, and the inviolable seal of the confessional was over it all.

"You will have ample space to prove it, Padre," the alcalde was saying; "I hope it may be so. There is also a charge of robbery."

"Señor Alcalde," said Saavedra, "there is much here that wants explaining." The good Padre must be forgiven for regarding this as a new onset of the temporal powers against the spiritual business of the Brothers of St. Francis. Almost as if they guessed his purpose with

Escobar, here was a plot to snatch him away out of the Padre's power. As for the charge, he believed nothing of it; he had confessed Isidro as well as Juan Ruiz, and rejoiced to find him as clean as a maid.

"No doubt the Señor Escobar will be happy to explain upon all proper occasion," said the alcalde. "In the mean time I must ask him to go with these gentlemen."

"By whom is the charge preferred?" asked Saavedra; his wits were all abroad after Juan Ruiz, — how to come at him, how to shoulder the crime upon him and remain within his priestly prerogative.

"By his companions, Nicolas and Ramon, shepherds to Mariano, who have found the body." The alcalde threw out his hands. "Forward, gentlemen." The deputies took Escobar each by an elbow.

"Fear nothing, my son," said Saavedra. "I have that in mind which shall loose all bonds."

"And I," said the alcalde, "have a duty to perform; we will go at once, if you please."

"I go," said the Padre, "to bring that which

shall clear you. Go in peace, my son, and may the God of peace go with you."

Isidro said nothing at all. Ten minutes later El Zarzo came out of Marta's hut and dogged them unseen to Monterey.

XI

THE QUEST OF JUAN RUIZ

IN the orchard closes of San Carlos Isidro had been smitten with a sense of the sufficiency of the Mission Fathers as men. Now he was to have a revelation of the men as priests. The Brothers of St. Francis, who admitted no material hindrance, who dug, hewed, and planted, unbound all considerations of want and toil, were themselves in bondage. Men who made themselves masters of a raw land and unkempt thousands of its people were overmastered by their own vows. If they loosed others, themselves they could not loose.

Vicente Saavedra was a man of parts, great in dignities, honored in place, but before all a priest in orders and a servant of God. His great work as Father President of Missions was not set before his greater service in the cure of souls. Within his province he could plot to use the Escobar

connection to the advantage of the missions, and be commended for the contrivance by the measure of its success; but he could not, to further that design, abrogate his position as spiritual father to a filthy shepherd with a stain of murder on his soul.

Except by the greatness of his determination, in the present trouble he was no greater than the meanest of his priests. He had the whole tale of suspicion from the shepherd Ramon, the whole business of Noé and Reina Maria from Escobar, and the confession of Juan Ruiz to make all straight. As for the robbery, he took no account of it, not being able to lay it to either party. What he knew to be truth was that Mariano, not Ruiz, lay out in the unblessed grave on the Mesa Buena Vista, and Ruiz, not Isidro, was the murderer, but knew it by such means as made his surety impotent. Not for any of the considerations entering here might the seal of the confessional be broken. What he must do was to find Ruiz, and by the sword of the Spirit bring him to open confession; and now that prompting of the Spirit that had secured from the penitent

the right to seek him out in the interest of one unjustly accused in his stead, assumed in the Padre's devout mind the proportions of Divine Intervention. Saavedra might not declare Isidro's innocence, but Juan Ruiz was pledged to it could he be found. Forthwith the good father set about it. He visited Isidro in the calabozo at Monterey and comforted him. "God," he said, "permits his people to be vexed for no light purpose. Do you, therefore, my son, set yourself to discover the meaning of God behind this visitation of humiliation, and so nourish yourself in the wisdom of the Spirit. Meanwhile, I go to bring that which will serve you this turn." So having made the best disposition that he might of present affairs, Saavedra set off with an Indian tracker, and very light of baggage, upon the trail of Juan Ruiz.

It was, after all, though tedious, an affair of no great magnitude to follow and find the vanished shepherd of Mariano. There were not at that time above two thousand souls in Alta California not of the native races, — *gente de razon* they were called, and of these was Juan

Ruiz. His mother was a Mexican; his father might have been Mariano as well as any other. He was well known to hunters and trappers and the riffraff of population that floats into new lands; within a fortnight he had been heard of at Santa Cruz hearing mass at the Church of the Holy Cross.

This business of the mass had stripped him of all his poor earnings, and left him bare to the purpose that lay all this while at the back of his mind like a stone in a pool, — not revealed because of the troubling of the waters. Rid of the witnesses and the fear of dead men walking on his trail, the thoughts of Ruiz began to turn toward the strong box at the head of Mariano's bed in the hut at the place called The Reed. It was not for that he had killed Mariano, but the Portuguese being dead, and Ruiz impoverished for the good of his soul, it was fitting that Mariano should pay. By now the sweat of fear began to leave him, and Ruiz recovered the low cunning which was the habit of his mind. So, on the day that Isidro and El Zarzo rode into Santa Cruz, Ruiz went out, telling no man, with

no baggage but his shepherd's staff and a parcel of bread and meat, bound for the place of The Reed.

He went south all day by piney wood and open slope, meeting no one, walked on into the night as long as the moon lasted, and slept under an oak. He supped next night at an Indian rancheria, where they shared with him what fare they had, and asked no questions. The third day brought him early to the place of The Reed, having made good time; for ever as he trudged there grew in him the lust of gold, — the touch and sight of it, the clink of bright pieces falling together. He ate very little, feeding on the pleasures he would buy with Mariano's coin, the bustle and change, fine clothes, the lusting, the feasting, the drink — ah, well, not so much of that, perhaps; the Padre had forbidden it; but there must be money enough in that strong box to make peace with God in charities and devotions for such small transgressions without curtailing them. Oh, the golden coins, the golden days! Then from glowing hot he grew cold to think of his treasure — *his!* It had come to

that with him now, — lying there in the tenantless hut for any wandering thief to take. Who knew if Mariano had made fast the door, seeing, when he went out of it last, he had no notion of being so long away? Suppose Nicolas and Ramon had been there before him, scurvy rogues both. So he hurried his going, ready to do killing again for the sake of the slain man's treasure, until he came to the place of The Reed, where he was brought up again by the fear of Mariano.

The hut looked low and menacing in the evening light, shut and barred, weathered and soiled and mean. The pool, reflecting all the light waning from the concave heaven, glimmered palely at him like an eye. He heard the reeds whispering above it all night long. Ruiz had not dared to come into the hut in the dark, but lay out near it, watching, watching, lest any come out of it to surprise him where he lay in long pauses of strained wakefulness and snatches of haunted sleep. But when earth and sky had cleared to a cool gray, and rabbits began to stir in the long grass, he was up and had broken the

lock with a stone. He found the box at the bed's head, as he had known it, but bound with iron, studded with nails, double-locked, a weary piece of work. He tried the lock with his stone, tried the wood with his knife, fumbling and hurried; bethought himself at last to stumble about the dark and filthy corners of the room for a mattock. The clank and thud of it upon the chest rolled out and scared the rabbits from the pool; it jarred Ruiz to a fury of haste and fear. So between pounding and running to the door to see if any one spied upon him, he wrestled with the chest in the darkling hut until the gold poured out of the riven wood, and he knew himself shepherd no longer, but his own man, and rich. He was quieter after that, looked about him, found a bag for his coin, found food, and remembering that Mariano would have wine — he felt the want of it by now — looked for it until he found it in a kind of crypt under the bed, and carried away as much as he could handle. Then, being laden and wearied, he turned south slowly to fetch up with the place where he had left Mariano. Father Saavedra, you will remember, had

bidden him bury the man, and, in fact, Ruiz would hardly have any peace until he had seen the sod upon him.

On this business, chiefly because of great fatigue, he was three days more, meeting no one but Indians, and reached the Mesa Buena Vista shortly after Mascado had visited it. Here he fell into a new terror, greater than all, for he found the fresh-dug grave sunken to the shape under it. Here was discovery hot upon his track; Mariano's death known, himself, no doubt, guessed as the murderer. Sick, shaken, he went back to where he had covered his gold, for he would not come into the presence of Mariano with it, and drew together his wit, which had gone all abroad with fancying himself cunning and rich and altogether a fine fellow. But because his wit was slow, he went on a day and a half in his old course before he was able to shape a new one. First, his plan had been to work down to Santa Barbara to take ship there and away; to live well, and to take pains never to confess to the theft of the money until after he had spent it. Now he thought best that he should

turn north, skirt the vast, dim valley of the San Joaquin, cross the river, and so make the Russian colony out of the bounds of Alta California. So he planned, and, returning by the end of the Mesa Buena Vista, was in time to see Nicolas and Ramon, with Noé and Reina Maria, digging up what remained of Mariano. By this time he was clean daft with terror, and lay out in the scrub for a day, drinking Mariano's wine. He took to the trail again while the drink was still in him, and so had a fall in a stony place, wrenching his foot. Then he began to want food, being afraid now even of Indians. In a day or so the need sobered him even of the drunkenness of fear; the habit of his shepherd life began to assert itself. He began to study the land, to lay the shortest course, to find roots and fruits, contriving that he should fall in with the bands of renegade Indians who, under Urbano, laired like beasts in the Tulares. But Urbano at that time had other affairs in hand. Ruiz kept to the border of the hill country; eastward lay the lineless valley, full of a brooding mist, formless and blue; dark and low on the horizon lay the Tulares, and

the river in the midst of them maundering down to the bay.

Meantime, Father Saavedra, with Saco the tracker questing like a hound, followed the shepherd's trail. Learning at what time he had left Santa Cruz, and guessing his errand in part, they had turned directly toward the Mesa Buena Vista, since it seemed likely Ruiz had not heard that any one had been before him with the burial. They pushed the way very shrewdly, and before long had trace of him. Among the Indians whom Ruiz met was a woman to whom he had given a gold piece, thinking himself a man of means and able to requite favors handsomely. The woman made a hole in the coin and strung it about her neck, having, in fact, no other use for it. This Saco spied, questioned, and reported. So the robbery was accounted for, and Father Saavedra went with his head sunken on his breast for the space of several hours. He could not escape the conclusion that Ruiz must have gone fresh from the confessional and the sacrament to this new transgression. Approaching Buena Vista, Saco found the place where Ruiz

had hidden his treasure while he went to look his last on Mariano, and found the newer trail going from it; later they found an empty bottle where he had cast it from him, and a coin in the grass where the shepherd had dropped it in his drunken walk. Finally, they struck into his very path and the print of his limping foot.

Riding out from the Mission the Father President had sat his horse cheerfully, resting the issue of the affair, as his habit was, on God. He had in him that spirit of delighted service which informed the labors of Junípero Serra, craving whatever circumstance of labor or sorrow that brought him into touch with the Divine Will. Come what might of this business of Juan Ruiz, Padre Vicente had no doubts; he was still able to interrogate every anguish, What lesson hast Thou? A little as a lover rides into the garden of his mistress, expecting sight or reminder of her at every turn, so rode the Padre upon his errand to surprise the purposes of God. Thus at first, but the long journey wearied him. The evidence of the shepherd's fresh crime, following closely on the sacrament, gave him heart-sickness.

The lust of man-hunting, which glowed in Saco as he pricked forward on the freshening trail, oppressed his soul. Lastly, he began to be troubled for the physical distress of the fugitive himself; the dragging foot, the rag of torn clothing by the brook where he had bound it up, the holes where he had dug feverishly for the roots of wild hyacinths, the wavering of the course which betokened unease of mind, gave the good father concern. In the beginning, he had ridden this quest for the sake of justice and Isidro; at the end, he pushed it hard for the sake of mercy and Juan Ruiz.

XII

THE PLACE OF WOLVES

BETWEEN the hills and the Tulares is a treeless space, rolling, shrubby, — herding-place of deer what time they run together. Transversely across it frothy winter floods gouge out furrows, sharp and deep near the cañon mouths, running out shallowly valleywards at the limit of waters. Here run turbid streams in wet weather, two or three months of the year; for the rest, they lie void, bone-dry water-scars, and wild beasts dig their lairs in the banks of them. Hereabouts is the Place of Wolves, *El Poso de los Lobos*. Here are stinking holes where the lean-flanked mothers with heavy dugs go in and out to the whimpering cubs; here are foxes' covers and stale old lairs of the dogs of the wilderness, sunken caves, weathered niches all a-litter of old bones; earthy hollows where a hunted man might safely

lie. It was a place known to trappers, guides, wanderers for any profit of the hills or for no profit at all, and to Juan Ruiz.

The reminder of the lair is strong in a stricken man, — to draw to cover, lie close, keep dark; to have the sense and nearness of the earth. Juan Ruiz, knowing the place of old, lame, a-hungered, feverish, hugging his gold, crooning over it to comfort himself for his pains, steered his course for the broken lairs of the *Poso de los Lobos*. In his mind he designed to shelter there and recover from the sickness of terror and fatigue, but the shuddering soul of him purposed more than that. Unawares, it drove him with the last instinct of the burrowing beast, the while he thought himself following a clever plan. A man who commits a crime without first taking his own measure is likely to find himself in such a case as this. He must be brute enough to have it lie wholly without his sensibilities, or his determination must be greater than all these; otherwise the thin wall of reason cracks. In the fifth night of his flight from Mesa Buena Vista, Ruiz slept under a thicket of buckthorn on a forward

sloping hill. The night was soft, dark, warm, and sweet; no coyote howled nor bird awoke; the tormented soul departed into the borderland between death and sleep and found an interval of rest. About the mid-hour he started up, warned by the wolf sense of pursuit. It seemed such a sense watched in him while he slept. Often keeping the flock of Mariano he had roused at night before the unease of the dogs made him aware of danger; now he trusted that sense as he had been wont to do, and, in fact, the warning was true. Father Saavedra and Saco camped on his trail not a day behind him. Ruiz got up and shook off the stiffness of his limbs; huddling as the air began to chill toward morning, stooping as the weight of his treasure told on his shaken frame, dragging his swollen foot, he worked his way down the hill front. He followed a dry wash as long as it served him, then struck across a clear space of knee-high, shrubby herbs and grass. He had no light but star-shine and the candle at the back of his brain, that burned brighter as his vital force waned in him. So he forged northward, and the day widened and shut him in like

the hollow of a bell. Back on his trail followed Padro Vicente, pitiful and prayerful, and Saco, the hair of his neck pricking like a dog's as the trail freshened.

By mid-morning Ruiz was out on the plain beyond the limit of small waters. Rain had fallen scantily on the eastern slopes that year, and few streams ran beyond the foothills. So, as the day advanced, he began to add to the fever of his flight the fever of thirst, the more severe because of his oblivion of delirium. It would come over him while he rested in the short shade of the scrub, and ease him of his pains and terrors until the brute warning of pursuit urged him forward. He made as straight a course as the land and his fuddled wit permitted for the *Poso de los Lobos*, to hide his gold and himself. Saco and Saavedra had sighted him, a moving speck in the haze, about the second hour of afternoon, and though they lost him again in the rolling land, expected confidently to come up with him before night.

By this time Ruiz had forgotten about the priest and Mariano. He was hardly conscious of much beside the bag of gold which he huddled

in his bosom ; in his disorder he conceived that some one followed on his trail for the sake of it. Therefore, as he neared the *Poso de los Lobos* he began to go very cunningly, trod as much as possible upon the stones to leave no trail, and went back and forth upon his tracks. Stooping from the top of the bank, he fixed upon a bob-cat's lair, high up above the possible reach of waters. Leaning above it he kissed his treasure, half in tears to put it from him, half laughing with the pleasure of his cunning, made a long arm, and dropped it out of sight. Then, wallowing in the loose soil of the bank to leave no trace of hands or feet, he contrived to push down a quantity of gravel and loose stones until he had blotted out the mouth of the lair. That was the last flicker of the cunning mind. He had hidden Mariano's money from those walking on his trail, and hidden it so securely that come another day he would not be able to find it himself.

There was a niche in the north bank of the wash that must have been left there first by the falling away of a great boulder the size of a wine cask ; behind it the earth was a little damp from

some blind water source that in a rainy country might have been a spring, and the coyotes had scented it in a dry season, pawing deeply into the bank. Now and then in hot weather they returned, drawn by the water smell to dig for it and cool their hairy flanks in the cool dampness. The opening had thus grown larger than any lair, and smelled of beasts. The displaced boulder lay not far from the mouth of it, and loose soil from above had piled about it, making a barrier that screened it from the unaccustomed eye. Here Juan Ruiz hid himself, clean gone out of his natural mind, lacking food and drink, but glad of the darkness and the cool damp of the clay, to which he bared his aching foot, and in his gladness of relief and the sense of the solid earth about him, babbled foolishly as a child. Here, when the sun was not quite down, Saco found him singing in a feeble, merry voice the old nursery rhyme which begins : —

Señora Santa Ana,
Why does the baby cry ?

Saco, starting out from San Carlos, knew nothing whatever of the Ruiz affair except that he

was a man the Padre wished to find, and his trail was to be picked up somewhere about the Mesa Buena Vista. There, having found and followed it to this conclusion, although he was as pleased with his skill as a hound that has brought the fox to earth, his Indian breeding forbade him any expression of it. He squatted on his haunches by the lair, rolled a cigarette, and appeared to dismiss the whole matter from his mind. He looked now for Padre Saavedra to take up the turn, and the Padre had forgotten for the moment that he followed Ruiz for any other purpose than the man's own relief. If he had remembered it at this juncture it must have been a sharp jog to his faith to find Ruiz brought to a pass so little likely to serve his purpose.

The Padres had always the means by them for bodily relief as well as for spiritual remedy. They were never lacking simples nor the materials for the sacrament, christening, marriage, and burial. Saavedra sent the Indian up the wash with the horses for water, and himself turned nurse. By the light of a brushwood fire and a few hours of the moon he bound up the shepherd's foot and

covered him from the night chill with his own blankets. As often as the Padre came near him to handle and relieve him, Ruiz remembered Mariano and the tortures of his soul; when they let him lie, his mind wandered off foolishly on the trail of the nursery song.

Señora Santa Ana,
Porque llora el niño?

he sang as he lay stark on the earth, and then, as the Padre lifted him, "Ha, hell litter, you will leave me, will you? Take that! and that!" — and then failed for weakness, and feeling the comfort of the blankets began again presently piping and thin: —

Por una manzana?

"Rest, rest, my son," said the Padre tenderly, and the raucous voice of the shepherd answered him with curses intolerably obscene. It fell off in obscure mutterings that clarified after an interval to the gentle air, —

Que se le ha perdido
Venga V. a me casa
Yo le daré dos,
Una par el niño y otro para vos.

So it went on, mournful and sweet in the

shadows, until the clink of horses' feet on the boulders, as Saco returned with the water, roused him to present memories.

"Cursed be the wood of which it is made, thrice cursed the iron that binds it! Will it never come open?" cried Ruiz, rising up in his place. "Faugh, what a filthy house for a rich man to live in! Ah, the pretty pieces, ah, so round, so bright! all mine, *mine*, MINE!" His voice rose to a scream, the Padre's hand was on his breast pressing him back upon the blankets.

"Drink, my son," said Saavedra, holding water to his lips.

"Ay, drink, Mariano," said Ruiz. "Good wine, excellent wine, and a pretty price, eh? Another bottle;" then as the water cooled him he was minded to sing again: —

Señora Santa Ana
Porque llora el niño?

"In nomine Patris, — per Christum Dominum," breathed the Padre above him.

"Beast — Devil's spawn!" gurgled Ruiz from the Padre's bed.

So it wore on for the greater part of the night,

but about the ebb of dark, when there was a smell of morning in the air, he woke out of his delirium tolerably sane. The presence of the Padre seemed not to surprise him; he was stricken with death, and knew it as the earth-born know, as the coyotes that dug this lair might have known before him.

He had come out of his stupor clear of the fear of men, knowing his end near; but the sight of Saavedra signing the cross put him in a greater terror of hell fire. He clutched a fold of the Padre's gown and fell to whimpering, but was too far spent for tears. This was the Padre's hour; tenderly and by all priestly contrivances, he lifted the poor soul through his agony, and for the ease of his conscience, to the point of open confession. The Padre wrote it out for him by the flare of the brushwood fire he had called Saco out of deep sleep to light, and held it carefully, for the fidging hand to mark with a cross over the name he had written. Saavedra had signed it Juan Ruiz. The dying man gave back the quill, speaking more at ease, as the troubled will after open confession.

"I'm not sure that it is right," he said; "Ruiz is not my name. It is the name of a man my mother married at the pueblo San José. I am not sure what my father's name might have been; my mother was not married to him. She died years ago; she was Maria Lopez."

"What!" cried the Padre, "Was she, indeed, Maria Lopez, daughter of Manuel Lopez of San José? And are you her son born out of wedlock? May God be merciful to you a sinner! Your father was Mariano the Portuguese."

That was a time when the consideration of the pangs of hell was potent to drive souls to salvation, and men were keen to pronounce judgment. What deeper pit was there than that reserved for the parricide? The groan which was forced out of the Padre at the sudden revelation, his starting back, the horror of his countenance, smote upon the poor shaking soul like the judgment of God. With a great broken cry Ruiz threw himself upon the Padre's breast, clawed him, clung to him, wrestled with him as a man might on the edge of the pit to win back out of it, with hoarse bestial breathings, a wide mouth of

terror, and staring eyes. Saavedra, wrenched free, forced him back upon the bed, and trembling laid the blessed wafer between stretched lips from which the soul shuddered in departing.

They buried Juan Ruiz in the place where he lay, in a beast's lair, after the Father President had blessed the ground. Saco rolled stones across the mouth of it and made a little cross of withes. All his life after Saavedra had moments of self-accusing, in that he supposed he might, by the better control of his countenance in that crisis, have given the poor soul a larger assurance of the mercy of God.

They spent a day looking for the gold of Mariano, but got nothing for their pains; Juan Ruiz had not been very clear in his account of how he had hidden it. There, no doubt, it lies to this day, high up in the bank of the wash in the bobcat's lair in the *Poso de los Lobos*.

Then, with the confession under his belt, the good Father President of Missions set back by the shortest route to the Presidio of Monterey. He had been gone just a week.

XIII

DELFINA

THERE was a woman in Monterey of a mischievous and biting humor, but not wanting in generous impulses, curious above all, a great lover of gossip and affairs. This Delfina had wit and traces of beauty, and, along with great formality of outward behavior, considerable reputation for impropriety. She had come into the country ten years since with the family of the, at that time, governor of Alta California, as a sort of companion or upper servant, on a footing of friendly intimacy, which she maintained, by report, with the governor at the expense of the governor's lady. At any rate she had found it convenient to break off that connection and establish herself in a little house just beyond the plaza in company with an elderly woman who was called by courtesy Tia Juana. The house had a high wall

of adobe about it, and a heap of wild vines riding the rooftree and spreading down to the outer wall, affording, so she was accustomed to say, great sense of security to her solitary way of life.

It was not possible in so small a community as Monterey quite to overlook a lady of such conspicuous claims to consideration as Delfina, for that she possessed them there was no one heard to deny; and, indeed, she was not lacking friends willing to affirm that she was most infamously put upon, and possessed of as many virtues as accomplishments. She was the repository of all possible patterns and combinations for the drawn-thread work which occupied the leisure of that time; she was a competent seamstress; invaluable at weddings, christenings, and *bailes*, in the way of decorations and confections, and an industrious and impartial purveyor of news. Among the most judicious and surely the most disinterested of her supporters was Fray Demetrio Fages, who visited her frequently in the interest of her Christian salvation, as he was heard to affirm; and was made the vehicle of liberal donations to the Church, which she was accustomed to bestow

out of an ostensibly slender income. Since he was so often at her house it is to be supposed that he found no company there not to his liking, and no behavior not suited to so godly a churchman; but even upon this there were those disposed to wink the eye.

In one way, however, the friendliness of Fray Demetrio gave Delfina better countenance among the matrons of the town, as it gave greater weight to any news of hers which related to the affairs of the Missions, since none so likely to know the facts as the Father President's secretary, and none more apt in the distribution than the secretary's friend. If Delfina had been kindly received before, judge how it was in the month which brought Valentin Delgado and the younger son of the Escobars to the Presidio of Monterey. Both these events, in the bearing they had upon the Church, gave a new fillip to the absorbing topic of the imminent secularization of the Missions, the probable distribution of the great wealth of herds and silver which they had, and the greater wealth with which report credited them, and the possible effect upon the settlements of

removing from the authority of the Padres some thousands of Indians who required very little scratching to show the native savage under the mission gilding. Then there was the old story of Ysabel and Jesús Castro revived with new and fascinating particulars, for there were several people in Monterey who held a remembrance of the beautiful and unhappy woman. Along with this was the arrival of two pretty gentlemen of excellent manners and good blood, — one from the capital in search of a wife and a fortune, the other from Las Plumas, ready to renounce all these in favor of the priesthood. You will perceive that Delgado had let some hints of his purpose be known; and, indeed, so obvious a conclusion as marrying the heiress when he had found her would have been tacked on to any account of his proceedings whether he had declared it or not. And to crown all this, when gossip was at its best, came the arrest of Isidro on a double charge of murder and robbery, and the departure of the Father President on some mysterious errand of justification or disproval.

Delfina, who had seen Don Valentin and en-

tertained him in her house behind the wall, had the most to say of the first affair ; but of Isidro, who had not cared, or had been too much under the supervision of the Father President, to make her acquaintance, — Delfina herself inclined to the latter opinion, — she knew only what Fages could tell her, and that, beyond a shrewd guess or two and some malice, was very little. Both her vanity and curiosity, therefore, were set upon the trail of the mystery behind the bare fact of the arrest. She began to cast about for some plausible ground for invention or explanation, and this led her in the course of a week to the servant of Escobar, who was still in Carmelo in the house of Marta. From Fages Delfina had learned, almost by accident, that the boy had not accompanied Isidro from Las Plumas, but had been picked up by the way. This seemed a very pregnant piece of news ; to point to an accomplice or at least an accessory after the fact. Delfina set herself to fall in with the lad and have it out of him by cajolery or whatever means. It happened that her instincts led her soon into the proper juxtaposition for that very business.

Since Isidro's arrest she had been in the habit of taking her evening walk in the neighborhood of the calabozo, as, indeed, how could any lady of sensibility help being drawn in that direction by the pitiful case of this handsome youth cast into prison on so heinous a charge, which must, no doubt, prove unfounded, or at least justifiable. And being so employed she observed, on more than one occasion, the lad called the Briar lurking about with a great air of disconsolateness, and the assumption of having no particular business. It was her instant conclusion that he walked there for the purpose of some secret communication with his master, and it wanted but the right moment of quiet and the absence of other observers; and Delfina concluded she might bring about a conjunction which would serve her ends.

In fact, the lad had no such purpose as the woman credited him with, having reached that point where he would have sold himself to the devil without parley to have quieted his hunger for a sight of Escobar, sound of him, print of his foot in the earth, or any indubitable sign of

his living presence. And that he might have had if he had known enough to apply through Padre Salazar to the proper authorities. As the servant of Escobar he might have had free access to his person, but he was too little used to the ways of men to have known that, and, perhaps, too shy to have used it if he had known; so he hung frequently about the walls that inclosed Isidro, fevered with desire, but maintaining a tolerable appearance of having no interest there. This was that wild lad called the Briar who had come up to Monterey with Señor Escobar, charged with a packet from Peter Lebecque, having instructions to deliver it and himself into the hands of the Father President. He had parted from the trapper with little compunction, for, though the old man stood in the place of a father to him, he showed little of fatherliness, accepted him as a member of his household, neither to be greatly considered nor denied. Since the death of the Indian woman Zarzito had called mother, the lad had known loneliness and the desire to mix with his own kind which stirs in the blood of the young, and had ridden this

adventure with Escobar by instinct, as a bird of passage attempts its initial flight. For the first time he had tasted companionship, faring forth in the royal spring, young blood timing to young blood, and the world all singing and awake. But the lad was most a creature of the wood. He had, one might say, the wit and the will to be tame, but kept the native caution of wild things. Therefore, had no other reason arisen, he would have gone slowly about the business of resigning himself to the disposal of the grave President of Missions. But another obstacle had arisen: love, forsooth. The love of young lads for older, the love of the companionable for gay companions, love of the dawn soul for the soul of morning, — love, in short, — but of this you shall presently be better instructed. It was no great wonder that the hill-grown lad should love Escobar, so wise and merry and cool, and of such adorable and exasperating gentleness that it irked him to see thieves whipped and wild eagles get their food. It seemed to Zarzito that he could devise no better way of life than to serve Escobar, and follow him even into the cloister,

of which you may be sure he had no very clear idea. But in the mean time the packet troubled him, for Lebecque's instructions had been plain upon the point that it should be turned over to Saavedra, and his intimation that the Padre would thereupon put him in the way of good fortune. It appeared that El Zarzo desired no better fortune than following Escobar. But the real point of his difficulty was this, — he did not in the least know what the packet contained. The lad had not known much of priests or men, but he had learned rapidly, — from the Indian woman Marta, from walks and talks with Escobar, from mere seeing; he had sucked up information as the young sage of the mesa sucks up rain, filling out and erecting visibly. So he knew there was one fact hid from the Father President which, if it became known, would put an end to following his heart's desire. The question was, did the packet give notice of it?

On a day when Isidro had been about a week in prison, the day before the Father President returned from the quest of Juan Ruiz, El Zarzo sat a long time under an oak and considered the

matter, turning the packet over and over. It was long and thin, wrapped in a black silk kerchief, wound about many times with thread, and sealed up with gum. It showed no sign nor superscription, — apparently nothing to connect it with Peter Lebecque's lad or the servant of Escobar. Zarzito concluded that if it could be placed in the Father President's hands without his agency he would be quit of his obligation at the least possible risk. Accordingly, in an unwatched moment he dropped it in the alms-box at the door of the church. It was part of his newly gained information that whatever went in at that opening found its way eventually to the priests.

It was close upon dark when El Zarzo came that evening with the light foot of his Indian training around the corner of the calabozo of Monterey. A bank of fog-built mountain hid the meeting of the sea and sky; a kind of whiteness, reflected from the near-by water and the level beaches, lightened the air. Across the plaza came the thrum of guitars, and the voice of singing mixed with children's laughter, and the cheerful bark of dogs.

On the side of the prison away from the town was a window high up in the wall; between the bars fanned out the pale yellow ray of a candle. The wall was all of adobe, plastered smoothly up, and whitewashed. Below the window two or three cracks, which could be widened out with a toe or the fingers, afforded slight and crumbling holds. Within the wall all was still; no sound or motion from the prisoner or the guard. The candle rayed out steadily toward the sea that broke whisperingly along the beaches. El Zarzo's heart beat loudly in his bosom, stirred by the nearness of the well beloved. He reached up the wall for a finger hold, put one toe in a crack and raised himself a foot or two nearer, clinging and climbing like a worm on an orchard wall. Delfina at that moment came mincingly around the corner on her errand of curiosity, and caught him there. The lady, who was as quick in execution as in design, made no outcry to have aroused the guard, but went and plucked him swiftly from behind, and dropped her arms about his body as he came tumbling from the wall. The lad was but a slender armful for one of her build, and though

he writhed and wrung himself, he could neither get at her to do her hurt nor to set himself free.

"Be still," said the lady; "I want but a word with you." But the lad struggled the more.

"Be still, you brat," she said again; "do you want to bring the guard upon us?" But though El Zarzo had his own reasons for not wishing it, he did not or would not understand, and while she struggled and fretted with him Delfina made a discovery.

"What, what!" she cried, and her note was changed to one of amazement and smothered laughter; "so the rabbit has jumped out of the bag! — What, what, my lady," she said again, continuing her investigations with chucklings of mischievous delight; "and he a priest! And you his body servant! Fie, oh fie!" Her voice quavered with the burden of offensive mirth. "Be still, you little" — But the word will not bear repeating. El Zarzo grew sick to feel her hands fumbling about him, and limp and quiet more at the insult of her tones than at any word.

Behind them they heard the sudden stir of the guard.

"Come away," cried the Briar, panting and shaking. Delfina wished nothing so much as to get to the bottom of this affair uninterrupted. Holding fast by the lad's shoulder she ran her prisoner down the open road toward the bay, and out where their running left a wet trail on the sand. The tide was low and quiet. Few lights showed on the seaward side of the town. Nothing moved in sight but the shape of a solitary horseman on the road above the beaches. It seemed a safe and silent hour for all confidences.

"Confess; you are a woman," said Delfina.

"I am a maid," said the other in a dry whisper.

"Oh, yes now, a maid," said the older woman, mischief beginning to stir in her; "no doubt a maid, and he a priest."

"I will hear nothing evil of him," flashed the Briar.

"Why, to be sure," bubbled Delfina; "and he, I dare say, will accredit you with all the virtues of Santa Cecilia. All priests are alike. I also could tell you" — But it was plain the girl did not hear; she had begun to twist and wring

her hands, with a kind of breathy moan, as one in great distress and unaccustomed to the use of tears.

"You will never betray me, señora," she begged, "you will not?"

"Why, as to that," began Delfina, moved greatly by curiosity and a little by the girl's evident distress, "that remains to be determined. Let us hear your story."

But the girl continued to wring her hands and cry brokenly without tears.

"I will tell you," she said, "yes, I will tell you," but made no beginning. The horseman on the upper road had passed on behind them; they did not see him wheel his horse and return upon the sand.

"Oh, I meant no harm, señora, and no harm must come to Señor Escobar because of me, — ah, yes, I will tell you," began the girl again, moving her lips dryly. Delfina shook her to quiet her own impatience and the other's quaking sobs. At once there came a hiss and hurtling through the air, a wind of whirling flight, a tang of tightening cord. The girl gave a gasp

and staggered, began to cry out chokingly, threw up her hands, shook and struggled as with an invisible wrestler, and at the same time began to move with extraordinary rapid stumbling toward the horseman who had appeared opposite them on the sand. He drew toward the girl as she drew to him and showed dimly a naked Indian through the dusk.

Delfina saw him approach the girl, lift her to the horse in front of him, and choke out her cries and the beating of her hands upon his breast. Delfina, too much astounded to cry out, was running heavily up the sand toward him, but only rapidly enough to see the Indian riding at a gallop toward the mainland, reeling in his riata, as he rode, about the body of the girl, who seemed still to twist and struggle in his grasp without outcry. A very little such pursuit warned the older woman of its futility; she stood at last staring and panting as she watched the man and his burden ride away into the soft dark.

XIV

LAS CHIMINEAS

NIGHTS of early summer along the coast of Monterey are damp and heavy with sea-dew. It hangs on the blossom tops in the wild pastures, and drips down the fine brown needles of the pines. Swift passage among the close thickets of the hillslopes shakes out the moisture with a sound of rain. If the moon rides in the seaward sky it will be dim and ghostly white with mist, or wholly quenched in a floating bank of fog. A night rider through the wood wakes querulous jays in the oaks and deer from the deep fern. He must pass by sea marsh and spongy meadow to stony ridges and thin, dark clumps of pine, and in an earlier time of scant and ill-kept trails must have had great faith in his horse and his luck. So rode Mascado on a line that led directly inland from the peninsula. He drove hard and wildly, careless of the trail he left; keen whips

of the underbrush slapped against his bare legs as he rode. He was all bent on holding fast what he had got, and making the shortest going. As he rode he felt what the woman Delfina had felt, — the young budding breasts crushed against his bosom, and thrilled to the passion of the primal man, double joy of the huntsman and lover.

He rode east, leaving the Mission to the right, labored through a stretch of rolling dunes, lifted his horse carefully from the bog of back sea water, passed the wild pastures, and struck on to rising ground. At every shift of the rider the girl struggled shrewdly, but neither wept nor cried out. Once he spoke to his horse and she grew instantly quiet. He trembled through all his naked body at the sudden loosening of the tension of hers. Had she recognized his voice? was this the quiescence of submission? They rode; he felt her breast heave and fill under his hand; the weight of her body was sweet upon his arm. The sea wind blew about his face; wet, pungent-smelling leaves brushed against his horse's sides. He had expected protest, had been led on and advised to this point

by the effort of his spirit to match with hers. Now the cessation of struggle daunted him. His passion had reached that state where it was necessary for his ease to know how she stood toward it. Cautiously he loosened the blanket with which her head was covered and met the girl's level, unfluttered gaze.

"I wish to sit up," she said; there was hardly a shade of interest in her tone. Mechanically the man raised her until she rode more at ease. "Unbind the rope, it cuts me," she said again, with a terrible matter-of-factness that sent his passion receding from him like a wave from a rock. He fumbled at the rope a little, and got no thanks for it. The girl looked about her quietly by the dim, watery moon. "Where do you go?" she said at last, but not at all as if she supposed she was going with him.

"Far enough from Monterey."

"But where?"

"Las Chimineas."

"And what will you do there?"

"Keep you." There was a sudden tightening of the arm about her slim young form; it met

with no answering movement of repulsion or complaisance. Mascado saw he had still to deal with Peter Lebecque's graceless boy. Many a time in the last year at the hut of the Grapevine he had tried to betray her into some consciousness of himself as a lover through her consciousness of herself as a maid, and had been beaten back by the incorrigible boyishness of her behavior. He had begun by allowing the child to browbeat and revile him, and afterwards found himself in no case to deal with the woman, being swamped by the embarrassment of his own passion and Lebecque's contemptuous perception of its futility. His desire throve best in absence, and suffered a check in the moment of personal contact. He had hours of doubting whether he should ever be able to take her, not being able to put her on the defensive, and he was savage enough to need a hint of fleeing to whet the courage of pursuit. Vaguely, though he had resented the hand of Escobar upon her, he expected that experience to have made a short cut to his desire, for he had believed the most concerning that relation ; Lebecque had seen to that out of

a rascally humor to pay the mestizo for his presumption, and, believing the girl gone quite out of the range of the half-breed's life, had not spared innuendo. And Mascado without the old Frenchman's hint would have come to the same conclusion, seeing that the girl passed everywhere as a lad and the servant of Escobar, slept at his door, and companioned his solitary hours. Probably no other conjunction would have braved Mascado for the capture and the sally at dusk, for he had a servile taint of his Mission upbringing, and the girl's spirit was imperious. But greatly as his passion had exalted her, the passion of Escobar, for so Mascado understood their relation, had brought her down. There was even an appeal to his savage sense in bearing off what had been the prize of another, and he suffered a check in her unconsciousness of the situation. She sat indifferently under the pressure of his arm, drew even breaths, and looked about her. Half in response to her unconscious carriage, Mascado relaxed his hold.

"The corporal of the guard looks for you in yonder hills," she said at last.

"He will look far and long without finding me," said Mascado.

"So you said once before, I remember," remarked the girl.

Mascado had no answer to that.

"At Carmelo they showed me many things," she went on; "among other things the whipping-post;" she laughed low and amusedly.

The mestizo felt his gorge rise. "And among other things," he said, "you saw also the prison, you and your fine gentleman. He will see a rope, doubtless, before all is done, with his killing of silly shepherds and stealing of sheep."

"That is a lie, Mascado," said the girl simply, but she also shivered. "It is cold," she said; "put the blanket about me."

Mascado drew it clumsily across her shoulders. They were traveling slowly now, stooping under trees and picking the way on stony ground. Once they forded a stream where the water came gurgling to the horse's thighs. The girl fidgeted and made fretful noises of fatigue. Presently Mascado felt her weight sag against his arm; by gentle constraint he forced her head

back upon his shoulder and saw that she slept. Mother of saints! here was a girl torn from one lover by another, who had come against her will from a delicate-mannered gentleman to be ravished by a renegade mestizo in the hills, and she slept, — by God and His saints, she slept!

The moon had come free of the belt of fog that hangs about sea borders, and poured clear and light on the shut lids and drooping mouth. Mascado looked, and, though he had no words for these things and believed otherwise, suffered a remote perception of unassailable virginity. He passed on, wondering, through the night. Two hours later the girl was roused by having a fold of the blanket drawn tightly across her mouth. Mascado bent over her and threatened with his eyes. He held the rein with the hand that constrained her, and with the other pressed the point of his knife against her breast. A little way ahead she saw a glow ruddier than the moon on the scrub. They had nearly stumbled on a camp in the dark. An Indian had risen up at the disturbance, and thrown fresh fuel on a dying fire, — stood listening and intent. The

girl could see by the dress that he was of the Mission. She thought for a moment that it might be the corporal and his men, but as Mascado, guiding chiefly by the pressure of his knees, backed his horse away, she saw by the glow the face of the Father President, as he lay sleeping, turned toward Carmelo. Slowly, almost noiselessly, they backed away and around the camp; she could see the Indian still watching as long as the camp-fire served for a light. The glimpse of Saavedra set her thoughts back toward Monterey and Isidro; she slept no more that night. At moon-set Mascado drew up under an oak, and lifted her from the horse under the canopy of thick dark.

"What is it?" she said; "it is not Las Chimineas?"

"Here we rest," said Mascado; "there is no further going in the dark." Not the smallest star-beam showed through the close tent of the oak; the air under it was heavy and damp. Mascado heaped up leaves for her, and spread over them the folded pad of coarse woven stuff taken from his horse, all the saddle he used. She

sat down, and he sat opposite her, holding the stake rope of his horse. So they sat for a space of two hours; the first gray dawning showed them watching each other with wide, regardful eyes.

Mascado took the trail again as soon as it was light enough to be moving, and by sunrise had come to the place of the Chimneys. Heading east among the highest peaks of the Monterey coast is a broad, shallow gorge, having in its middle a pleasant open glade, nearly treeless, walled in by a slaty formation weathering in huge upright pillars and nodules, standing singly or in files; or higher up tumbled and falling athwart one another, affording tunnels and draughty caves of shade. Among the standing boulders trickle clear, warmish springs to water the cañon floor. Here, from time to time, had harbored more than one distressed clan, the smoke of whose hearth-fires had blackened the bases of Las Chimineas. It was clear morning when Mascado rode into the cañon; wet shadows lay on the grass between bars of yellow light. The mid-meadow was succulently green and white

with flower and leaf of *yerba mansa*. Its rosy pointed buds floated in the tops of the grass, dipped and bobbled with the motion of it in a rippling wind. Cool gray shadow spread among the caves, and small water chuckled on the stones. It was such a place and weather as might have served for a bridal morn. Mascado and the girl brought no bridal mood to it. Mascado was sure of nothing except that the girl seemed to have no hint of his purpose, which he should have to convey to her, and had no notion how he should begin. It seemed that he still held Peter Lebeque's boy within the circle of his arm, riding as unconcernedly as she had ridden in a bygone spring, — before he had known her for a maid, — and presently she might insist upon climbing up on his shoulders, as she had once done, to look at a hawk's nest in a blasted pine. And, in fact, the girl was farther from him in spirit than the child had been, panoplied by her love for Escobar, — though she did not call it by that name, — wrapt in it above the sense of all offense, so that if he had accomplished his intent upon her person in that exalted mood he

could have left no stain upon her mind. He had expected protest and tears ; rather counted on it to spur his lagging desire, always a little confounded by her cool assumption, now increased as she measured him by Escobar, whom she judged as far removed from him as the order of archangels or other blessed personages.

She had, in fact, very little thought to spare for Mascado at that moment, thinking that by now Father Saavedra would be moving toward Carmelo with the promised relief, and a few hours later, say by the time the shadow had gone up from the floor of Las Chimineas, he would be at Monterey. Comforted in that, though wearied of her bonds and hard riding, she was able to respond a little to the morning note of freshness and delight, and keep the ascendency over Mascado as she had done in the hut of the Grapevine, flooding him with lover's delight at the nimbleness of her wit, with embarrassment at her gibes, and secret fuming that he made no better way with her.

"Your mother at Carmelo prays for your soul," she said, as he went about to prepare a

meal of food he had brought, "but I shall tell her to pray for your wits; you have burned all the cakes."

And again, "Mend your fire, Mascado; it smokes like a lazy mahala's." But when he brought a fagot on his shoulders for its plenishing, "Oh, spare your back, Mascado; you will need it when the corporal of the guard comes up with you."

"Where now, Mascado?" she said with the greatest cheerfulness when the meal was done, and she sat loosely bound against a broken tree.

"Here," said Mascado; "it is safe enough. Did you think your fine gallant would be looking for you?"

"Why should he?" said the girl coolly; "he has better things to do than looking for stray serving lads."

"For a serving lad, yes," said Mascado with a secret and insulting air. "But a wife" —

"What talk is this?" said she, yawning in his face; "here are no wives, unless you have a fancy yourself for turning mahala, as seems likely."

"MEND YOUR FIRE, MASCADO"

"But there will be one," he said, ignoring the taunt with deep insinuation.

"Big talk," she said; "but where there is no bride and no priest how will there be a wedding?"

"I have never heard that there was any lack of weddings among my people before the priests came," said Mascado, with something of a grin. "As for a bride" — He stopped full, and let his desire burn upon her from his eyes.

"Mascado, you are a fool, and Peter Lebecque will kill you," said the girl.

"I am a free man. What will Peter Lebecque know of my doings?"

"All that I can tell him," said she.

Mascado let his gaze wander pointedly along her bonds.

"And is it your purpose to keep me tied up forever and a day that you may cook and clean for me, like *el cojo viejo* in the Mission, scouring pots and tending a tame squirrel in a cage? For look you, do you so much as slip the knots of my rope and turn your back, and you have seen the last of me. Do you remember the time I sent

you and Peter Lebecque seeking and crying through half the day and night while I lay in a crypt of the vines almost under your noses? Eh, you are a fool for your pains, Mascado."

The girl had him there: she had the tricks of an Indian for making her way in the hills; but she was no Indian, who, once the subjection of her body was accomplished, would bring her mind into accord, sit by the fire, and follow at the back of him who had made himself her man and the father of her young. Mascado's notions of the married state partook of the earth, but, such as he was, he wanted no prisoner, but a wife. There would be small satisfaction in keeping her bound, and no safety in letting her go free.

"Well," said the girl, much as if she had disposed of the whole matter, "if we travel not, I sleep, though the bed is none of the softest." Stolidly, to hide a certain shamefacedness, he brought her an armful of leaves and young boughs, which she took indifferently enough with her face turned away. Mascado staked his horse in the wet meadow, and set snares to catch quail and rabbits for their food. His Mission training

had lost him th' familiar use of the bow, and he had no gun.

The girl spent most of the day upon her bed of leaves, her head hidden in her arms to hide the quivering of her face. She felt herself in desperate need of succor, but knew not from what quarter it could come. Supposing the Father President to have brought Isidro his freedom, would he be of a mind to follow his errant lad? and who but the woman Delfina should tell him that El Zarzo had gone against his will? and if Delfina told him that would she not tell all? Ah, never all, never tell him all! Better Mascado should have his will of her at present, and trust to finding some better shift at the last. For she had no thought of marriage with Escobar, — was he not dedicated to God and His Church? All that she asked for herself was to stand at his door and serve.

Then seeing no better issue of her affairs she would fall a-trembling with nameless dread, and feeling safe for that day, resolve to sleep, the better to wake and watch against the terrors of the night. She could trust to holding Mascado

in check for a time, but there must come an hour of weakness, of fatigue, a moment of darkness and surprise, — she grew sick to think of it. And then across it all would come the dream of ineffable sweetness, — the joyous road to Monterey, the strolls on the beaches, the sea music and the sea air, Escobar walking with his hand upon her shoulder, the vesper hour when, kneeling on the bare tile flooring, she had leave and liking to watch Escobar through the changes of the hour's devotion. Little looks, little ways, a trick of tossing back his hair, a gentle irony of laughter, the way his fine hand lay on the bridle rein, — all these came back and pierced her with seductive pain. So the day wore on warm and still into the afternoon.

XV

THE RESCUE

SAAVEDRA, working back toward Carmelo with the confession of Juan Ruiz in his wallet, had lost time on the last day's travel by reason of over-full creeks and flooding fords from recent rains on the seaward slope of the hills, and camped for the night several hours out on the trail. Saco, who knew every foot of that region as a man knows his own dwelling, would have pushed on through the dark, but the Padre fancied the horses too much fagged, and managed to do with one more night away from his own bed. He was up and stirring with the dove's first call to dawn, and got into the Mission for the eight o'clock breakfast with Padres Gomez and Salazar. The table was set in the corridor looking toward the bay, and white drift from the pear trees blew in on the morning air. Leisurely, as concerned their several juris-

dictions, the Brothers of St. Francis gave him news of flock and folk, — of a death in Monterey and a christening set for Wednesday of that week, of a sail sighted off the Point of Pines, and much small talk of the garden and field.

"And yesterday," concluded Padre Salazar, sipping his chocolate comfortably, "I found in the alms-box this packet, which, as it bore no name or superscription, I judged best left to your reverence's disposal."

Saavedra took the thin, oblong packet of black silk and turned it over absently. "Quite right, brother," he said, "quite right. I cannot at this moment conjecture what it may contain, but I will make the earliest occasion to examine its contents, when I have this affair of Escobar off my mind. As for the calves, Brother Pablo, I always say you know more of that matter than myself, and I will be pleased if you will continue to follow your own excellent judgment. I will look at the garden, Ignacio, on my return from Monterey, where I must be almost immediately in the interest of this young man, whose affairs I trust presently to put in better shape."

It was a piece of the Father President's humility that he never rode on any affair of the Mission when he could walk, and in that he patterned after the sainted Serra; but this morning toward the Presidio of Monterey he rode at a smart pace, with Fages cantering at his back, very keen to know, but not daring to ask, what the journey promised Escobar. It had occurred to him that the youth was too forward in the Father President's favor for his — Fray Demetrio's — good. He had experienced a pious glee in Isidro's arrest, which it now appeared was ill timed. The padre was too cheerful and too much in haste not to be the bearer of good news.

They rode at once to the alcalde, whom they found at breakfast, very well disposed toward the Father President now that he conceived himself to have the upper hand, and toward the family of Escobar, which he esteemed discreetly. He had had his fill of puffing and importance in the week past, and answered expansively to the tactful courtesy which Saavedra, in any affair not directly impugning his authority, knew well how to display, and between them they made a very pleasant

occasion. The alcalde was charmed, overjoyed in fact, to learn that the young man, of whom, except in his capacity as magistrate, he had never a suspicion, should have come so handsomely off. But an affair of the state, you understand, my dear Padre, — it could not be dropped, dismissed as one might say the word. There were formalities — the circumstance had been noised abroad — it was due to himself as the civil authority, — a mere servant of the Republic, my dear Padre, — and to the young man, to give the fullest publicity to his justification. But under the circumstances he saw no reason why the youth — truly a most admirable young man — should not go at large. He would see to it, — if the Padre Presidente would excuse him until he put on his street-going clothes? Yes, and in the mean time try a glass of wine which had come around the Horn?

The alcalde bustled himself into the house; the Padre sat in the gallery and sipped his wine, and having a quarter of an hour of undisposed leisure, took out Padre Ignacio's packet from the bosom of his gown, and broke the confining threads. When the silk kerchief was unwrapped there fell

out of it two folded papers, the merest glance at which gave the Padre as near to a shock as was possible to his well-ordered mind. They were the marriage certificate of Jesús and Ysabel Castro and the baptismal certificate of Jacinta Concepcion, their child.

Saavedra stood up suddenly, betraying his years as he did in any sudden tide of excitement, and called to Fray Demetrio. The secretary came running and agog, hoping for news. "Do you, brother," said Saavedra, "do me the kindness to remain here and wait upon the alcalde — this packet — I have business with the Comandante. Neglect nothing which may be for the Señor Escobar's relief, and bid him wait for me presently. I will be with Castro." With that he gathered up the papers and the skirt of his cassock, and made hastily across the plaza, at that hour beginning to fill with children and dogs and a detachment of soldiery turned out to drill. The secretary managed the release of Isidro to the alcalde's satisfaction and his own, each swelling with authority and disposed to yield to the other's pretensions to save the more credit for his own;

they were, in fact, a pair. Within another quarter of an hour Isidro had walked out into the morning, and shaken off both those worthies, who seemed disposed to bestow upon him their company. He walked seaward, and watched the fisher boats beat in across the bright, blue stillness of the bay. He wished that Saavedra might be speedily done with this business of the Comandante's. The week of incarceration made the strange town and strange folk seem more strange. He was hankering for the company of his horse, which he had raised from a colt, and the lad Zarzito, whom he had known quite four days longer than any one in Monterey. He wondered that the boy had not visited him in prison; now that he thought of it, it might have been arranged; but of course El Zarzo would have been too shy to have put himself forward, — shy and, no doubt, lonely in his turn. Isidro walked down to the sea border, and strolled in the wet track of the retreating tide, which was the place Delfina had elected for her morning walk.

There is no doubt Delfina had a nose for affairs; she had scented something going forward at the

alcalde's, and had come out with her shoe-laces untied, and a *manta* covering the inadequacies of her morning toilet, with all the mincing airs of a woman wishing to inaugurate an acquaintance with a young man to whom she has not been properly introduced. You can guess that Isidro, notwithstanding his vocation, made no great difficulty at this juncture.

"It is the Señor Escobar, is it not? Yes, — you must pardon my forwardness; it is impossible not to take an interest in one so estimably regarded and so grossly accused." To the natural insinuation of manner Delfina added the play of her fine eyes.

"There is no pardon — rather cause for gratitude," said Isidro, making her a bow and a compliment after the fashion of the time. "You add to my freedom the contemplation of beauty and the society of the graciously inclined." He fell into a certain familiarity of exaggerated deference with remarkable ease for a man who was to become a priest.

"But, no doubt," Delfina watched him sidewise through dropped lids, "there are others — one

other — whom the Señor Escobar would have wished to see."

"On my soul, señora, not one."

"Oh, the men, the men!" fluttered Delfina; "oh, the faithless ones! and the poor girl in such straits, too!"

"If it pleases you to jest, señora" —

Delfina assumed a grave and monitory air. "It is no jest to her, I 'll warrant, señor. Indeed, I am not one to cry down my own sex; she was most faithful, Don Isidro, visited the prison every day in hopes to have sight of you, and went not away except by force, and most unwillingly, — that I can testify."

"But she, señora, *she?*" cried Isidro. "What the devil does the woman mean?"

"Ah, if the señor wishes to preserve the incognito," said Delfina, beginning to be mischievous and amused, — "but with *me*, señor? Well, then, the wild Briar that keeps its roses for secret plucking, the mestizo lad, — or is she Indian? — whom you brought out of the hills, — El Zarzo."

"El Zarzo, — what of him?"

"She is gone, señor," cried Delfina, with a

sweeping air, — "seized, stolen, ravished, murdered and buried by now for all I know."

"But how? When?" cried Isidro.

"Last night, by an Indian, I think; at least he had no clothing. We were walking here on the beach, but up at the prison I had just discovered — I wished to know — she was about to tell me, and we heard the guard coming."

"But she, *she!*" cried Isidro.

Delfina looked at him in a momentary blankness. "Does the man mean to say that he does not know?" she said, and then dismissing it as wholly absurd, returned to her gurgle of secret amusedness.

"Oh, the men, the men!" she said. "We were walking here, Don Isidro, where we now stand, and it was just the edge of dark; suddenly there came a hissing through the air, — a riata, I think, — and I saw a rider draw up to her and she drew to him, but she went unwillingly enough, — and in a moment he had her in front of him and was away."

"El Zarzo?"

"El Zarzo, so called."

If Isidro appeared cool at that moment it was because he was too much confounded. Delfina was too circumstantial to be greatly doubted. She put him through all the steps of the evening's performance; showed him the evidence of struggle, the galloping hoof prints that began where the shoe prints ended. The horse she judged to be a pinto pony, the man an Indian. Isidro quested forward on the trail; Delfina panted beside him.

"Arnaldo," she said, "is the best tracker in Monterey."

"Send him to me," said Isidro curtly. He had all the woman could give and wished to be rid of her. Delfina took her dismissal cheerfully; she needed the rest of the morning to spread her news abroad. She had mixed herself with what might prove a most interesting scandal, and stumbled on a hint of a really untenable situation. "For suppose," she said to herself, "the man really did *not* know!" and she dwelt upon that point until she was back in her house behind the wall.

Arnaldo the tracker, a short, keen man, came

on his horse; in those days, in that land, a man saddled and bridled to go the length of his own dooryard. Isidro sent a boy to bring his own horse from the pastures of Carmelo. Arnaldo made a detour of half an hour to fetch necessaries for the day; together they worked on over the cold trail. There seemed a promise of mischief in the rider's haste, — in the broken bushes, deep hoof scars, flakes of black loam cast up by running.

"It might be Mascado," said the tracker; "he has been seen lately in this quarter. He has a pinto of about that stride, and he rides like the devil."

"On the devil's errand," said Isidro; but the name, which he remembered only as the name of a renegade wanted at Carmelo, carried no information. He was in great confusion of mind, which found no relief except in haste, though he could scarcely have told to what end he hurried the tracker on the open trail. He would say that the lad El Zarzo was in peril. But why? Why? A lad by his own account half Indian carried off by another. But if he believed his own judgment

the lad was no Indian, and if he believed the woman Delfina, no lad. Well, then, if a maid, peril enough and reason enough. He began to recount occasions and circumstances, — the lad's personal reticence, a certain avoidance of innuendo and embarrassing incident too constant, now that he recalled it, not to imply an intention; and, on the other side, a certain fearless matter-of-factness, an impertinence, as it were, directed to no person but to events, to destiny, endearing in a boy, but hardly to be looked for in a girl. But the lad was a good lad, — well, a girl, then, if it must be, — so no doubt a good girl. Here Delfina's amused insinuating gurgle recurred to him; it brought a hot flush and certain sickly prickings of shamefacedness.

"Sacred Name of a Name!" What was the woman doing now but spreading her news in Monterey, — excellent gossip about an Escobar who set out to be a priest. In his hurry he had neglected to stop her mouth, as he reflected he might have done with a compliment and silver.

Isidro was, first of all, a clean and honorable

youth. If he regarded the priesthood as an opportunity rather than a renunciation, he was not single in his time, and though he purposed a discreet use of its prerogatives, he meant sincerely to keep within its restrictions. He had respect to its orders, and as a man and priest he wished to stand well with the Father President, and he had all the high and formal breeding which runs with pure Castilian blood: the finikin hospitality and that exaggerated punctiliousness toward women which often consists with no very high estimate of the possibility of feminine virtue. If Delfina said truth, — and, though he rejected it, he found his mind working around toward conviction as fast as the tracker worked over the trail, — if it were true that the boy was no boy, then he had set a pretty snare for his reputation to fall into. Peace he might make with Saavedra through the confessional, but his father, the old Don, would be furious that he had so far forgotten the manners of an Escobar as to take a mistress, in the guise of a servant, under the Father President's roof, and having so conducted his journey to Monterey as to have himself accused of murder and sus-

pected of theft, had no sooner come free of that taint than he was off hot-foot after the girl and her Indian lover. That was the construction that would be put upon his behavior, and Isidro owned that he would probably have believed it in the case of any other. As for the girl, she was quite ruined in reputation, and any explanation of his would add a touch of ridicule to reproach. If these considerations had occurred to him earlier it is probable Isidro would have waited to take counsel with Saavedra before committing himself to the trail; but by the woman's account there was the lad, whom he loved for his endearing boyishness and clean, companionable talk, ahead of him on that road at the expense of who knew what indignity; and though the fact of El Zarzo's being a maid had not possessed his consciousness, it stirred in him an apprehension of unnamable disaster. As often as he thought of her it was of the nimble and teachable lad who had come through the hills with him in golden weather, or of the pleasant companion he had promised himself on a pilgrimage through Alta California, — but a maid — Oh, a pest on it!

Escobar felt himself aggrieved that his servant had not stayed a boy.

The sun beat upon them, and the trail stretched out mile by mile. Arnaldo hung above it from his saddle, finding it too plain for dismounting. By noon they arrived where Mascado had stumbled on Saavedra's camp, and Arnaldo chuckled to see how nearly the mestizo's haste had been his undoing.

"If it were Mascado he would sooner see the devil than his reverence," said the tracker.

After that it seemed the rider had taken a craftier way among the hills, concealing his trail more, and pursuit lagged through a hot, breathless afternoon. Later they came to where Mascado had kept the dark watch under the oak. Here Isidro looked for some signs of a struggle, not assured but relieved to find none. Here El Zarzo had sat, and here Mascado; here the horse cropped at the end of the rope. Isidro by this time fumed with impatience and saddle weariness. He rode after a week's inaction, and his breakfast had been prison fare.

"Caramba! but I could eat," he said.

Arnaldo swung the food bag forward on the saddle.

"Eat," he said; "the trail freshens."

"And where," cried Isidro, "do you think we shall come up with him?"

"*Dios sabe*, but it leads toward Las Chimineas. That is the refuge of many a hunted one. We should be there in an hour," said the tracker.

"We must find him before night." Isidro bore forward in his saddle with eagerness; as if some impalpable thread of intelligence ran between him and the girl, his sense of urgency lengthened with the shadows. They had made good time, almost as good as Mascado, saving the dark hours. It appeared the mestizo had ridden without fear of pursuit, and ridden, moreover, in the night, while they had the day for following. It was four o'clock when Arnaldo pointed out from a knoll the tall, single stones of Las Chimineas.

"From here we go cautiously," he said.

Meanwhile Saavedra had finished his talk with the Comandante. They had taken a long time to it, beating through all the possibilities that the

appearance of the two certificates at this juncture implied. Finding no thoroughfare, they came back to suck such comfort as they could from the mere fact of the papers spread out on the Comandante's desk. Castro was trembling, expectant, and confused; the Padre hopeful and confounded. The question was, from what source had the packet come? By all accounts no strangers or suspicious persons had come or gone about the Mission or Monterey that week past. Then could it have been dropped by any one resident in the capital or at Carmelo? At this suggestion, that one who had knowledge of Ysabel's child might walk within daily sight of him, Castro shook as with an ague. Padre Vicente sighed; he thought to have known the hearts of his people. Padres Pablo and Ignacio had been warned if the matter came up in confession to use all permissible means to bring it to light. As yet from this source nothing had transpired. It had not been possible to keep the affair out of common talk, perhaps not advisable. It appeared the flood of gossip had floated this packet out of the backwater of an unconscience-

able mind, — gossip, and not the searching sword of the Church. Therefore the good Padre sighed; therefore the Commandante fell sick. The word of each ran with power in their several provinces, but they could not compel a favorable issue of their own affairs. But why had the packet come to light and not the heiress? why the evidence and not the claimant? and why this concealment of the source? who held the information that would connect the papers with Ysabel's daughter? Ah, who, who? Was this flotsam all that was to come up out of the depth? Was it fear that kept the informant in the background, or was it simply that the child was not? Here Saavedra came to the surface with a practical suggestion, — a paper pinned to the church door offering a reward for knowledge of Castro's heir. The pride of the Castros demurred. Well, then, for information concerning the packet found in the alms-box on such a date? This was better, and was so agreed. Then, for sheer unwillingness to leave the conference with so little accomplished, they fell to talking of other things. Of this affair of Escobar, which the Padre wished put in the best

countenance; of the report, founded on nods and winks and suspicions, that Indians on the eastern border along the San Joaquin and the Tulares, under Urbano, fomented disturbances. The Padres had never pushed their labors very far from the coast. Inland the unregenerate lived in native savagery, and gathering to themselves malcontents and deserters from among the neophytes, became a menace to the peaceful establishments of the Mission. From Solano and San José came news of cattle carried off, and mutterings, and restlessness.

Father Saavedra was as loath to report these matters as to believe them, but felt something due to the Comandante. Urbano was rumored to be massing his followers in the wooded regions to the east.

"Saw you any such intimations on your journey, Padre?" asked Castro.

"None," answered Saavedra. "Now I think of it I saw not a dozen Indians this week past, nor came upon more than one camp which was not at least three days cold. It is surprising, I think, considering the report."

"Not surprising, Padre, but ominous," replied the Comandante, "considering what we know of their habits. At this season they should be spread abroad by clans and families. That you saw none is proof positive that they are gathering together in some other place and for some purpose."

"I trust not of mischief," said Saavedra.

"I hope not, but I do not trust where an Indian is concerned," said the Comandante, smiling a little. "But the detachment which was sent out for your fellow Mascado should be in any hour; they were provisioned only for ten days, and they may be able to tell somewhat. In the mean time I advise, Padre, that you let none of the neophytes pass between the Missions on any errands whatever." The Father President acquiesced. He was not the man for affrays; besides, had Urbano descended upon San Carlos, he would have met him in the fashion of the martyred Luis Jayme, saying, "Love God, my children," and as likely have met the same end. By the time he had finished with the Comandante and come out into the plaza again Isidro had been gone an hour.

XVI

ISIDRO COMES TO A CONCLUSION

THE place from which Isidro and the tracker looked on Las Chimineas was a thinly wooded hill, its coastward slope in the spaces between the pine boles well grown with stiff-stemmed manzanita and lilac now waning in its bloom. It lay directly opposite the head of the gorge, and the track ran around it, and over a low barrier running transversely of the rift that turned it sharply to the east. Beyond the barrier, which was clothed with wide low oaks, the gray chimneys began to rise, clustered thickly together. They parted in files, leaving the meadow space clear, and met in a jumble at the head of the cañon. The hill on which the two men stood butted into the left wall of the cañon, and made easy passage to a point above the crowd of chimneys. The whole trend of the cañon and encompassing hills was

south of southeast. The wood marched up to the crest of the west wall, leapt over, and began again midway of the opposite slope, which was higher, went on in an orderly and constant growth far east and south. On the down throw of the bare west wall where the chimneys piled high and disjointed, Arnaldo judged the renegade must be if he were to be found at all.

Las Chimineas lay gray and lonely in the brooding light, squirrels chattered and leapt, a striped snake slid by them in the grass, jays screamed and quarreled in the oaks. Presently Arnaldo held up his hand; the two men had proceeded almost without sound, for the habit of his trade was upon one, and heavily on the other the desire of slaughter. A jay steering a flight across the cañon veered suddenly near a group of tall chimneys; another, watching, wheeled toward the point, and avoided it with a volley of shrill abuse. Rabbits that ran in the meadow halted and pricked up their ears.

"We have him," said the tracker. He dropped from his horse, and began to work back on the trail to put the brow of the hill between them

and Las Chimineas. Isidro was no fool to stay the action with question; he took off his spurs, which clinked softly on the stones, and did as he saw the tracker do. In a ring of pines, screened by lilac, they made the horses fast.

"Go back and watch," said Arnaldo; "when you hear three quail calls, low and quick, and in the same key, I have news for you."

He pressed back against the thicket as he spoke; it seemed to spring aside to give him room; there was a little trepidation in the branches, a twig snapped, a bird started, the warm silence of the wood closed in again. Isidro looked at the places where the man might be supposed to be, but saw not so much as the glint of the sun on bare skin. He did not do quite as he had been told; he went back to the hill and over it, and by dint of all the Indian craft he knew, pressed down to the lower barrier and then up to the top of that, until he looked full on the meadow of Las Chimineas. In a secret place where the grass grew tall against the rooted rocks he saw a pinto pony a-graze at the end of a stake rope. This and the smooth spread of

open meadow gave him a hint and food for thought that lasted until he judged the tracker might have returned. He took a longer way back to the horses, looking for the tracks by which Mascado had presumably come into the meadow, and heard the signal given twice from the thicket on the hill before he came quite up to it.

"Well?" he said. Arnaldo the tracker was the man for such business; he handed you up the facts without discursiveness, and spared comment until the adventure was achieved.

"Mascado," he said. "He harbors below that one of the chimneys that has a red stain of moss upon it. The boy lies bound to a log of oak. Mascado mends the fire and goes about to cook a rabbit."

"Has he arms?"

"He has a knife about his neck, but neither bow nor spear. The rabbit was caught in a snare; I saw it hanging on a rock."

"Good," said Isidro; "I have seen his horse; the meadow is between it and him. Good again. Look you, Arnaldo, this is my game. Take this," —it was a pistol from his saddle holster, —

"and go back to the chimneys and watch until I have called Mascado out to me. If he so much as lays a hand on the lad, kill; but if not, then do as I say. When Mascado has come out to me in the meadow, unbind the boy, and bring him here. If I happen to any mischance, take him safely to the Father President."

"What will you do?"

"Do? Ah, there is much to do. You shall see." Isidro was coiling and recoiling the riata which hung at every saddle-bow in those days of Alta California. He ran it through his hands and rehung it to his satisfaction. The tracker observed him with a dawning grin.

"Mascado knows a trick of a rope," he said.

"I also," said Escobar; "now go."

He waited in the scrub until he judged the Indian close in to Mascado's cover; then, mounting, he drew cautiously around the end of the hill and rode freely into the meadow. He sat lightly in the saddle, and swung the noose of his riata with irrepressible cheerfulness. Escobar was his own man again.

"Oh, ho, Mascado;" he cried, "come out to

me!" His voice, high and pleasant, went searchingly through the rocks. The jays heard it, and replied with screaming; the squirrels heard, and stayed in mid motion as gray and quiet as the boulders. El Zarzo heard it, and sat up thanking God for a miracle. She knew the voice and knew at once that in her heart she had always expected he would come.

"Oh-ee! Mascado, come out to me!" Isidro rode up and down in the meadow swinging his rope. Mascado's muscle sprung to attention; he had his knife at the girl's throat; it was to say in its own fashion that Escobar should not have her. She looked up and smiled.

"Do," she breathed, "for after that he will but kill you the quicker."

Arnaldo judged it time for interference. He dropped like a cat from the rocks, his pistol cocked.

"Mascado, you dog," he said, "the Señor Escobar calls you."

The renegade was not without some sparks of manhood or philosophy; he stood up, dropped his knife into its sheath, dropped his arms at his

sides, and went out walking straight and softly to Escobar. Isidro looked him over with some amazement, which did not, however, abate his cheerfulness.

"What is that on your breast, Mascado?" he said.

"Scratches, señor."

"Sacramento! but they look to be the marks of deer's hooves, and not a month old at that."

The mestizo looked down at his scars with something of a smile.

"So it would seem, señor."

"It appears, then, that we have met before."

"So it would seem."

"On which occasion I did you a favor and got scant thanks for it."

Mascado had a wintry look. "For which later you did me harm enough, Señor Escobar."

"What harm, you dog?" quoth Escobar.

Mascado's face was bleak, but his eyes glinted. "El Zarzo," he whispered dryly.

"Now by God and His Christ!" said Isidro, "but that word is likely to cost you dear. But I cannot kill a dog standing. Get horse, Mas-

cado; I have heard you can throw a rope." Isidro's circling rawhide hummed in the air; he threw it up and kept it there by the whirling force of motion. He ran it out, and bid it follow the mestizo like a questing snake. It was an exercise in which his perfect attune of body and temper made him excellent. It had been said of him at Las Plumas that he won in such contests because he did not particularly care for honors where the eagerness of others shook the hand.

Mascado got his horse. Certainly Escobar had saved his life in the affair of the buck under the oak, but this did not mend his disposition; unquestionably Isidro had exceeded the requirements in permitting him honorable contest of a sort not uncommon in the country, but it did not lessen his hate. However, and it was much more to the purpose, the consciousness which he could hardly escape, that his private meditation did not fit very well with the circumstances, lent him a touch of shame that mitigated his skill. Vengeance burned in him sickeningly. The rogue was for murder if the chance allowed.

The mestizo took pains and time with his rope, fretted to see it a little touched by the dampness of the meadow. Isidro kept his swinging to a kind of wordless tune. Arnaldo and the girl had come out of the rocks and watched them from the hill.

"Come on, Mascado, come!" cried Isidro.

Mascado came; riding at full gallop he threw the rope, dipped as he rode and slipped from his horse's back to the belly. Escobar's noose slipped smoothly from his shoulder; in fact neither rope found lodgment. The sod of the meadow was wet and springy; it gave to the horses' feet; not the best ground for trying a duello of riatas, but there was advantage to neither side. They wheeled, recoiled, and rode. At the second cast Isidro's rope went neither far nor wide, but there was threatening in its hum. He bent backward as he threw; to Arnaldo, watching, it seemed that he went clean off his horse to avoid the flying loop that hovered a moment and settled on the horn of his saddle. It appeared that was the moment Isidro waited for; without casting off he stood with his horse at tension, and his rope,

which had gone but a noose length from him, shot out from his long right arm, dropped over Mascado, and with a jerk Escobar had him from his saddleless pony. The mestizo had his feet under him in the moment of lighting; if Isidro drew in fast Mascado came faster. One arm was pinioned, but the other was free from the shoulder; he had out his knife. He came in great bounds like a cat, rising from the springy meadow; rage foamed in him like unbridled waters. His own horse, with feet spread and planted, held Escobar at the end of a taut rope. Isidro fumbled at it to cast off, but not before Mascado got in a blow above the shoulder. Isidro set spurs and set them deep with the impact of the knife. The mestizo had a moment of check as the horse sprang away from him, but the tug of the rope brought him sprawling. His body rose in the air, thudded on the sod, rose again; and the knife, struck from his hand, whirled a gleaming flight across the meadow. By this Arnaldo came running from the hill and cried out to Escobar in God's name. The spurt of Isidro's anger, which took him the width of

the meadow, lasted no longer than the knife smart, and went out of him as the blood went, leaving him drained and faint. Arnaldo got his rope around Mascado's legs, and so bound and disarmed drew him up to them.

"See to him," said Isidro.

"And not to your wound, señor?"

"It will wait. It may be I have other scores to settle with this rascally half-breed." He turned his horse toward El Zarzo on the hill. On the way to Las Chimineas he had worked himself into a cool distaste for this meeting, but the affair with Mascado, the rage at treachery, the smart and indignity of his wound had the effect of a hiatus. He had a shock, therefore, to come face to face with the Briar looking haggard and large-eyed, with red marks of bonds upon her wrists. The qualm of meeting warned him how dear the lad had been. Isidro trembled as he got down from his horse. They were both pale, and shook, came close and stood by each other, but did not touch.

"Has he hurt you?" cried Escobar; "has he laid hands upon you? If he has wronged you I

shall kill him." Ah, ah! they were both red enough now, she in a tide of maiden shame that swept up to the dark crescent of her hair and confessed her what his words implied, he with shame for her shame. Well, at any rate, the mischief was out.

"Has he hurt you, señorita?" Isidro said again more collectedly.

"He did not dare," cried the girl.

"He will never have the chance again," said the young man. "I will deal with him as you wish." But the girl had a more pressing concern.

"You bleed, señor, you are hurt," she trembled.

"A flesh cut merely," he said; "Arnaldo will dress it." He meant nothing more than to reassure her, but to El Zarzo it signified the change in their relations. This month past he would have had no other serve him. She hung her head; there was no blinking the fact of his knowledge, though she did not ask him then, nor until long afterward, how he came by it. She was boyish enough to look at, lithe and slim, with

hair, straight as the fine slant wires of rain, falling on either cheek below the round, firm chin. But he knew her for a maid, and found the certainty confusion enough. It was all of an hour, and that for a man of his temper was a long time, before he was cheerful and cool again. Manlike he made her pay for his aberration, — put her miles from him by an exquisite politeness, made her miserable by proffered duty, in short, brought the trappings of good breeding to serve his own wounded susceptibility.

There was no question of going on that night. The horses were fagged, the riders, too, for that matter, and Isidro needed time to consider his affairs. The shadow of the west cañon wall, that had spread in the meadow and up as far as the edge of the wood on the east while Isidro and Mascado wheeled together, had by now reached the ridge and gone on deepening and darkling through the forest. Stars came out above it low and white. A troop of does and fawns running nose to flank came out of the oaks at the end of the barrier and passed on to the lower meadow. Higher up a bobcat mother led out her young

and played with them among the rocks; night hawks hurtled across the damp and musky meadow.

They lit a fire among the chimneys; three of them got little sleep. Isidro, nursing his hurt; Mascado, trussed like a fowl for the spit; Jacinta, for so she must be called, too much a maid not to want the relief of tears, too much a boy to know the use of them; Arnaldo, — but there was really no reason why Arnaldo should not sleep, therefore he did; and he being refreshed, the others in need of refreshment, they were up and stirring betimes. Isidro had settled with himself that he could not take the girl back to Carmelo, but must first find her harborage and see Saavedra. Something, also, he purposed toward Peter Lebecque, who was possibly most to blame for the girl's assumption.

"How do we stand toward Carmelo?" he said to the tracker.

"East by south."

"And how toward the other Missions?"

"We might fetch San Antonio by a hard day's riding; there is a trail hereabouts which

leads directly into it. All the others are best reached from *el camino real.*"

"And this trail, could you find it? Then to San Antonio I will go, but first I must dispose of this gentleman."

"The Father President," said Arnaldo, "would be glad of him."

"No doubt," said Isidro, "but we do not travel toward Carmelo, and, besides, we have but three horses."

"The world," said the tracker, "would wag as well without such cattle." Arnaldo was a free man from the south and had the scorn of the full blood for the admixture; besides, he had pricked up his ears to hear Escobar address the boy as señorita, and surmised how matters stood.

"A true word," said Isidro, "but I am in no mood for killing."

"Leave him to me." Arnaldo tied the mestizo by a great variety of knots to a tree, leaving his hands free; his knife he laid on a rock out of reach. "If he is diligent he may be free of his bonds by this time to-morrow; now we will ride."

"Let me not see him again," said Isidro. "Twice I have spared his life; the luck turns on odd numbers." They left him with black looks and stolid; he had not so much as raised his hand to wipe off the blood of yesterday's scratches. Isidro lifted the girl upon Mascado's horse. She could very well have sprung there, but it was part of the punishment he designed by way of alleviation for his hurt esteem; she had claims upon — just what he could not say precisely, but claims which he would satisfy handsomely, though he had no notion of putting her too soon at ease. He grew less assured of his position, seeing how she went staidly and with bent head, except for quietness the very boy that he had brought up from the Grapevine. But she was plainly no Indian; the more he looked at her the more he knew it; hands, feet, and high, straight nose pointed the assurance.

If Escobar were satisfied with the adequacy of his intention toward her, the girl was not, wanting the assurance of it.

"Señor," she said when, after an hour's riding, Arnaldo left them in a pleasant place of

flowers while he cast about for the trail, "señor, what will you do with me?"

"I will take you to San Antonio."

"And then?"

"Tell me the truth, — are you an Indian?"

"Señor, I do not know; Peter Lebecque has told me that I am not, but the woman I called mother, she was an Indian."

"What was Mascado to you?"

"Peter Lebecque's friend. At least he came often to our place at the Grapevine. Lebecque hunted and trapped with him, but I cannot think that he liked him. It was after Mascado had been with us that the old man would tell me to remember that I was no Indian."

"Why was that?"

"Señor, I did not know at that time. I think now it was because Mascado wished to have me."

"He knew, then, that you were a maid?"

"He has known it for two years; he says that Lebecque told him, but it must have been when they were at wine, for Lebecque was very angry."

"Why is it that you dress in this fashion?"

"Señor, I have known no other. It was my mother's wish, her that I called mother. I think she fancied I was safer so; it was a rough life."

"And you know nothing of your real parents?"

"Nothing. At the time I left the Grapevine Peter Lebecque gave me a packet which he hinted would have placed me rightly."

"What became of it?"

"I left it with the Padres at Carmelo."

"And nothing came of it?"

"Nothing, señor." There was no untruth nor evasion here, but if she had told him how long she kept the packet by her, and how disposed it, she must needs have told him why, and for that she had no words.

Hearing Arnaldo call they rode forward briskly. After that the talk was more at ease, all of the wood and the road and the wild things that crossed their trail.

"It is strange," said Isidro, "that we meet no Indians; I had thought the hills were full of them."

Said Arnaldo, "Report has it that they gather to Urbano in the Tulares."

"Think you he means raiding?"

"Against the Mission beeves, — no worse," said the tracker.

Jacinta said little of any sort, but that to the point.

"Señor," she said again when they came to an open grassy valley riding side by side, "when you have me at San Antonio what will you do with me?"

"Marry you," said Isidro with the greatest cheerfulness.

One guesses the marriage of convenience to be the procurement of more than simple living; the earthborn admits no inducement but the drawing of lip to lip and eye to eye, the seeking of each for each in its degree. One must go far from the well of nature to allow other reason; even the mating beasts know better. Jacinta knew nothing of scandal, nothing of caste except as by her love she put Escobar above all others, and, therefore, nothing of social expedients. Marriage was a great mystery, but needing love for its ex-

cuse; that much she knew. Though Isidro spoke of marriage he had not spoken of love, — no, nor looked it; and against a loveless marriage her maidenhood cried out. She would be hot when he was cold, shaken when he was steady; as often as he touched her, flooded with shame of her full pulse beating against his still one. How should she endure marriage with such a one, even though he be rated a god or among the Blessed Personages? It seemed a greater indignity than Mascado would have put upon her, for the first would but have held her body and this one had her soul. Plainly love sickens of desire if it be not the flower of love. All this Jacinta raged over formlessly, without speech. Of the chivalry which prompted the young man's intent she understood nothing; but seeing him smiling and well pleased with himself, judged that she was of even less account, and sickened, poor girl, even while she beheld him glorious in the young day and the flooding light. She could not dare, though she thought of it a hundred times, slip her horse and run hiding in the hills, trapped by her own weakness and his lordly will.

ISIDRO COMES TO A CONCLUSION

In such tides the spirit ripens fast, — quicker if it houses in Latin blood. Isidro was like to find little of the lad left by the time they came to the Mission San Antonio de Padua de las Robles. In the mean time he smoked cigarettes and discoursed pleasantly of many things.

XVII

A WEDDING AT SAN ANTONIO

OF the resident Padres at San Antonio, Tomás de las Peñas and Reyes Carrasco, Padre Tomás at least was no causationist. What he believed he believed, and that was the end of it. If Holy Church said a thing was good for you, it *was* good for you. Any failure in the application lay in yourself, or in the inscrutable wisdom of God, who often ordered things contrariwise to our expectation the better to increase the merit of belief. Holy Church had prerogatives of cursings and exorcisms and cuttings off, power against men and Legion and evil beasts. For it was not to be supposed that her children would be safe against persons and Powers of the Air, and be given over to the ravages of wildcats and bears.

There was a reason for you if you were so contumacious as to require one, though a greater

merit if you were able to believe it, whether it looked reasonable or not. Further than that, San Antonio himself had preached to the fishes, and Padre Tomás preached to the bears.

Something may have been wanting in the administration, for the Padre preached in the Mission church while the bears visited the calf-pens by night. These depredations continuing, Padre Tomás went farther, and cut them off from the company of the elect, as you shall hear.

The Superiors of the Order of St. Francis of Assisi had a wonderful keenness for parts. They put a man to his best use with seldom a mistake in the selection. This accounts for their being at once the least coveteous and most materially successful of Holy Brotherhoods. Padre Carrasco had a knack with cattle and the soil, Padre Tomás of the Stripes, a gift for the cure of souls. They got on admirably together, but, though their spirits seemed equal to their labors, it appeared at times that their bodies were ill set. Padre Carrasco was a lean man with a thoughtful cast; Padre Tomás was most mortifyingly rotund, comfortable, soft, and rosy. It was his particular

affliction that if he ate no more than a handful of peas with cold water, it stuck to his ribs and made him fat. Such being the case, there was no merit in abstemiousness, and the Padre did not practice it. He was a strict ritualist, especially observant of high feasts and festivals, very tender in confessional, mild as to penances, much loved by his people. His project of arraigning the powers of the Church against the bears was favorably looked upon by the neophytes. Holy water was efficacious in so many things! Upon this conclusion the day chosen was that same one upon which Isidro and his party were riding in from Las Chimineas. Toward the end of afternoon all San Antonio was out in procession, priest and priest's boy, chasuble and stole, censers, candles, and banners, and, to crown all, a picture of the patron of the Mission in a gilt frame; after these the choir and several hundred Indians, more or less naked, interested and sincere.

The procession skirted the fields, winding to avoid wet pastures and unclean thickets; the candles starred out under the gloom of the

bearded oaks, and paled again in the sun; blue smoke of incense curled across the meadows. The mellow voices of the choir set the time for the feet of the elder Indians, who shuffled and crooned melodiously behind them. Their bodies swung; they beat their hands together; it needed but a hint to set them off in the rhythmic ceremonial dances of their pagan times. Your native Indian is devoutly a lover of ritual; the neophytes of San Antonio were enjoying themselves highly. Padre Carrasco signed the cross in the air and sprinkled holy water on the tasseled grass. The voice of Padre Tomás rose solemn and unctuous.

"I adjure you, O bears, by the true God, by the Holy God, by the most blessed Virgin Mary, by the twelve apostles, and by our most reverend saint and patron, to leave the field to our flocks, not to molest them or come near them."

"*In nomine patris*," droned the procession behind him. Isidro and Jacinta came up with them at the northeast corner of the Mission inclosure.

Padre Tomás loved guests and the exercise

of hospitality, but he had other affairs. He waved the party of riders aside and proceeded with his holy office. They fell in with children and dogs tailing the procession, and so rode to the Mission, saw the candles, censers, and effigy of the patron disposed and Padre Tomás restored to his normal use.

"Padre," said Escobar, when he had introduced himself and been well received, "I desire you to give lodgment to this lady." The Padre stared, seeing only a slim lad with a sullen air. "I wish, also, that she may be suitably clothed as becoming her condition, and in the morning you shall marry us."

Isidro thought it well to be forward with any business once decided upon. He saw a hundred doubts, questions, protests, trembling in the Padre's countenance. He went on to forestall them. "No doubt there are many things, Padre, which seem to you to want explaining, but the first account of this matter I owe the Father President at Carmelo, to whom I am bound. After that I shall be pleased to make all things clear. For myself, I want nothing of you but a

meal; we have eaten nothing since morning." This was to Padre Tomás a predicament as serious as for a maid to be riding about in man's clothing; moreover, a matter within his province, and remediable. He felicitated himself that he had planned something by way of addition to his evening meal, — a little matter of stuffed fowl, a dish of curried eggs, a pastry of wild strawberries.

Isidro's plan to marry the girl he had known only as El Zarzo was not so much out of hand as it appeared. It had come out of him all at once like a shot, but there had been a night's meditation back of it. Once out, it was sure to be followed up in fact, for the youngster had great respect for his own judgments, and honored them with the act as often as possible. His attitude toward women was informed by the evidence of his time, — that they did not know very well how to take care of themselves. The girl was pure, — he was sure of that, — but in the common estimate besmirched; that was hardly fair, and Isidro loved fairness; otherwise he would hardly have allowed Mascado his horse and a rope. In much the same spirit he lent the

girl the succor of his name. He had a high and mighty notion that scandal could not stick on the skirts of an Escobar. Well, not if he was at hand to see to it. As for the girl, she was hardly in case to be consulted, having no one to take her part, equally no one to forbid the banns; and, being a girl, probably did not know what was best for her.

So far, good; he had yet to face his dedicate calling and the will of Saavedra, in whose jurisdiction he stood. That checked him; but as he had never felt the need of a wife, the obligation of having one sat lightly, and he reflected that there had been those who had arrived at saintship through a virgin marriage. He was honest enough toward Saavedra to admit that virgin it must be until he had heard the Superior's will in the matter. He looked to the sacrament to restore the girl's esteem, but he glozed over the inference that, as a good Catholic, if marriage made no impediment to his priestly career, the girl would still be bound. If he did not have her himself, no other could. If he thought of this at all he was not visibly moved to commiserate her estate;

by which you will perceive that there was more in the youth's heart, whether it was in his head or not, than he was rightly aware. Of all his contraptious obligations, that of providing for the girl stood uppermost; so he out with his proposal, and the thing once shaped, stood to it.

Padre Tomás was more than fluttered by the circumstance. He had a very simple way of arranging marriages among the neophytes, — every year he stood the marriageable youths and maidens in two lines, and if neither found any objection to the party opposite, he married them then and there, after which he delivered a homily. He had prepared one for this occasion overnight, but found himself put out of calculation by the high airs of Escobar, and the confession before communion of both parties. They had a difficulty just at the last, for the girl had no name by which she could properly be married. But as she was sure upon the point of baptism, and well grounded in the Christian observances, — Isidro's work, — it was settled by registering her under the name of her foster father, Lebecque, with the place left vacant for her Christian name until Isidro had

come back from the hut of the Grapevine, where he purposed going.

Escobar had half an hour with his wife in the Mission garden before he set out. The elevation of the sacrament was still upon him, that and the consciousness of having behaved much more handsomely than could reasonably have been expected of him. It lent him sufficient grace to get smoothly through with what might have been an embarrassing interview with a very pretty girl whom he had known as a boy, married without consulting, and was about to desert without compunction. The girl hardly came off so well, being in bondage, poor child, to a harder master than the marriage vow. But she was very pretty, as Isidro found space in the preoccupation of his affairs to admit. The clothes that had been provided for her were all that the Mission afforded, — in fact the holiday dress of the Señora Romero, wife to one of San Antonio's three soldiers, — a chemise of white linen, a neckerchief of fine drawn work, a cloth skirt, and the universal rebozo. The smoke-black hair was drawn back under a comb, and revealed the slow, soft oval of the cheek and chin,

so fine and transparent and richly warmed, running into the pale brownness of the brow, the black, deep-lighted eyes, invariably fine in her type, under the delicately meeting brows. She had a trapped look, — the look of a small hunted thing at bay, and the curve of the mouth was pitiful. Isidor admitted the haggardness as well as the good looks, but it struck no spark out of him.

"Wife," he said, for in fact he knew not what else to call her, "you seem to have fallen into good hands. The Señora Romero is no doubt an excellent lady. This leads me to believe you will be quite comfortable while I am about other affairs. I will go first to Peter Lebecque; there must be things which he should say to me necessary to your proper establishment. Also I must see Father Saavedra, for my leave-taking was something uncourteous. I doubt not the good Padre thinks me mad or dead. After that I cannot tell what will become of me, but you, being my wife, need have no concern. I will come again and see you safely and honorably bestowed, but the manner of it I cannot at this time tell. It

will be somewhat as circumstance and the Father President direct. In the mean time, I commend you to God and Our Lady, to St. Francis our patron, and to the hospitality of Padre Tomás."

This was the substance of his speech, delivered at length in the pomegranate walk of San Antonio's garden. Jacinta was dumb under it. Such was not the custom of bridegrooms; this much she would have known without the excellently voluble discourse on the nature of marriage bestowed upon her by the corporal's wife with the wedding clothes. She was the daughter of a proud, sensitive man and a sensitive, passionate woman, and, with her forest breeding, had the instinct of a wild pigeon for straight cuts. So she arrived at some very mortifying conclusions. First, that by her boy's trappings, which she had never thought to question, she had lost esteem of very many people, among them Escobar; next, that much as he disapproved of those, she was much more acceptable to him as Peter Lebecque's lad than as what she now showed to be; most of all, that not now or at any time had he acknowledged one pulse of the hot tide that

flooded her at the mere thought of him. She had lain all night with quick heart, clinched hands, and a maze of thought in which one thing only seemed clear, — the wild creature's instinct to seek cover and dissemble, never to let him know; the phrase had an echo to it as of some far receding wave in the crypts of consciousness, — the heartbreak of Ysabel crying in her child. All her energies were bent on that. She would have liked to run away into the hills, to the free life where she might never have word of Escobar, but she knew that she would run back again in sheer hunger for a sight or sound of him. One question she allowed herself in the Mission garden; all the pride of the Castros rose up and braved her for it.

"Señor," she said, "when we rode with Mariano's sheep toward Pastería you told me that you were to become a priest and priests may not marry."

"Why, as to that," said the young man, still going smoothly on in the consciousness of irreproachable intent, "the Church is very explicit as to continuing in the married estate, but many

of the apostles, I understand, and of the saints not a few, have been married before taking orders, notably St. Paul and St. Peter and Santa Cecilia; but that is a matter within the province of the Father President."

"And what will become of *me?*" was the cry that rose in the girl's heart and broke in a thin bubble upon her lips; she went dumb, — answered by nods only, with dropped eyes and folded hands. Isidro commended her discretion, when the poor child was only miserable. He kissed her hand at parting and found it chill.

To say that Padre Tomás was astounded to see the bridegroom ride away on his wedding morning was to say only half. He was even affronted, and stood choking and staring to receive Escobar's last instructions, delivered with the smooth, courteous air which sat so well on the personable youth. No doubt, thought the Padre, it was commendable to show one's self subservient to the Superior of the Order, and continence was a virtue; but if all men practiced it, how else would there be souls to save and God be glorified in

the multitude of his saints? Padre Tomás was reputed to have contributed something to that end.

Jacinta lay on her bed shaken with dry sobbing. Hot flushes sickened through her as she recalled the Señora Romero's pointed advice and sly allusions. In the weeks that followed she was likely to learn the use of blushes and tears and other woman's gear.

Isidro rode straight, with Arnaldo at his back, to the place of the Grapevine, reaching it on the afternoon of the second day's riding. He meant to have some plain talk with the old trapper, get a name for his wife and some satisfaction for his chafed dignity over the affair of Juan Ruiz, in which you will remember Lebecque was named a witness.

Trusting to Arnaldo's knowledge of trails, they left the traveled road, *el camino real* of that time, and went easily by a scantly wooded hill and a wide mesa, windy and high. This saved horseflesh, but gained them nothing in time, for, arriving early in the afternoon, they found Lebecque from home. Isidro sat in the shade of the

vines and smoked cigarettes. The place and the hour gave him a touch of homesickly longing for the spirited, shy lad, mixed with the haunting reminder of pale beauty in a frame of smoke-black hair.

XVIII

A COLD TRAIL

WHEN Valentin Delgado left Monterey he went straight to Santa Barbara, carrying urgent letters from Saavedra and the Comandante. With these he quartered himself at the Mission, and set about providing a daughter for Castro, an heir for the Ramirez fortune, and a wife for himself.

It was a cold trail. The occasion of Doña Ysabel's death was sixteen, nearly seventeen years gone, and had occurred at a time when every man dealt with trouble at his own door, with little attention to spare for the affairs of his neighbors. Doña Ysabel had kept matters close, leaning much on the woman Elisa, who had been her nurse and followed her up from Mexico. Jesús Castro was not at that time Comandante, and his family not so much in the public eye. Of the few matrons then at the Presidio some sur-

mised that Señora Castro had a child, but believed it to be stillborn, as might easily have been the case, for the poor lady was known to be ailing. It appeared, finally, there were but two people who had personal knowledge of the girl, if girl it was, born to Doña Ysabel: Padre Bonaventura, at that time resident at Santa Barbara, now at San Gabriel, and an Indian woman, Louisa, who with Elisa constituted Doña Ysabel's household. Elisa was dead in the same month and of the same disorder as her mistress; the other woman was, if alive, nobody knew where. Delgado went and looked at the tall cross which Castro had caused to be erected over his wife's grave, but got nothing from that; went and talked with as many as remembered the beautiful and unhappy Ysabel; got plentiful comment on the relations of Castro and his wife, but nothing more; then, by Padre Garcia's advice, went to San Gabriel.

Padre Victorio Garcia, resident at Santa Barbara, was an astute man, and knew his neophytes very well.

"You can do nothing here," he said to Del-

gado; "this people cannot be made to stand and deliver in a court of inquiry. They are like the quicksands that lie up the coast. You throw a stone and it goes quickly out of sight; the surface is smooth as cream, but underneath the sand it works — works; if you wait long enough it will cast up your stone again. So with my people. Get you to Padre Bonaventura; I will cast a few stones. In time something may be brought to light, but you must leave it to me."

Delgado went south, a brilliant figure trailing along the hard wide path of the King's Highway. He saw Padre Bonaventura, and heard from him what he already knew from Castro, but with more color and detail. How, during the time of the pestilence, there had come a cry in the night — "though, indeed, the nights were like the days for labor," said the Padre — to come to a newborn child that might not live. He found the child at Doña Ysabel's and baptized it, saw it carried out of the room by an Indian woman, and never laid eyes on it again. The mother he found very ill, judged that she had the fever upon her at that time. Some days later he was at her deathbed,

but her confession was so strange that, believing it mixed with delirium, he gave it insufficient heed, — "for I was much worn with watching, and my people died like sheep," said the Padre, — and in the midst of confession she died. The nurse Elisa had died the same month without the holy office, as too many died in that pestilent time. Afterward it was discovered that no one knew about the child, not so much as that there had been one.

Delgado felt he had helped himself very little, but he stayed a while and looked about him in the city of Our Lady Queen of the Angels, even at that time shortened to Los Angeles.

That accounts for eight of the nineteen days of his journeying. Returned to Santa Barbara, he found that some of Padre Garcia's castings had come up again. During the time of the pestilence many small parties of neophytes had taken to the hills, hoping to escape it, but, carrying the infection with them, spread it in the wilds. Later the remnant came back again. It was now reported that the woman Louisa had been one of these fugitives.

"Had she a child?" cried Delgado.

"No," said the Padre, — "no child, but her sister had."

"Well —" began the youth.

Padre Garcia held up his hand. "I have examined the records of the Mission, which were regularly kept except for the time that the fever raged highest, and I find that this sister — Juana her name was — had indeed a child of her own, a boy; but I find that about ten days before the death of Señora Castro that child also died at the age of four months."

"You think, then" — Delgado began.

"I think, my son, we will wait; the stones are not all in."

Delgado waited and looked about him. It seemed impossible that the child could be alive, or if alive that they could find it again, or if found, it should prove Ysabel's child, — three good chances that he must make another cast at fortune; and while he looked at the Mission stock and fields, speculating what pickings there would be when these were removed from the care of the Franciscans to the civil power, Padre Gar-

cia brought him news. One of the neophytes, who had been a renegade in the hills three years since, reported having seen the woman Juana with a French trapper in the wooded regions of the Salinas.

"Stale news," said Delgado; "and the child?"

The Indian remembered to have seen none.

"Bad news," said Delgado again; but with it he made an end of Padre Garcia's meddling with the affair, and set out with an Indian packer and a guide to look for a French trapper with an Indian wife northward in the Salinas hills. He meant to find a daughter for Castro in any event. There were not so many people answering to that description that he was likely to go far afield. He left the main road, struck into white, shallow trails, followed them until they ran into springs or melted in wind-shifted sand; went large and wide of any trail, inquired of chance-met Indians, slept one night at the Mission San Luis Obispo, slept seven in the open, struck false trails and followed them to confusion. He saw the young quail come trooping down to springs in the gray morning, saw the young fawns hidden by their

mothers in long grass, saw a great tawny cougar laid asleep on a limb above a slaughtered deer; he grew saddle-weary and sore, tore his finery in the chaparral, wet it at roaring fords, and came out at last at the hut of the Grapevine and Peter Lebecque. His dress was much the worse; he had lost the air and affectation of the capital; he had a network of fine wrinkles about his eyes from much staring in the sun, all of which helped him with the trapper. Delgado had the wit to deal openly with the old man, told him straightly who he was, what he sought, and all his intent except marriage, upon which he would in no wise commit himself until he had seen the girl. Lebecque heard him, peering shrewdly from the shaggy pent of his brows, but made no offer to open his own budget until they had eaten and had two thirds of a bottle between them.

"It is true," he said, "I am a French trapper, and I had a woman from the Mission Santa Barbara."

"And she had a child, not yours?"

"She had a child."

"A girl?"

"A girl."

"Where is she now?"

"At Monterey."

"Monterey! Since when, señor?"

"A month since."

Delgado began to fret visibly at the maddening, slow dribble of the old man's talk. "Monterey, a month, impossible! It is not three weeks since I left there, and neither Saavedra nor the Comandante had an inkling of it."

"Listen," said Lebecque; "it is a long story, but if good comes to the girl by it, let it be. Forty years I have trapped and hunted north and east in the country of deep snows. But I grow old, and my bones ache, so I have come to this land where the pelts are not so good but the living easier. Seventeen years ago I found me these hills; then I looked for a woman and a place to build me a house. I took my time for that." The old man spoke slowly, his words dropped from him like the dropping embers of his fire, as if each phrase lit for a moment some picture glowing for him in the ashes of remem-

brance. The fashion of his speech altered as he talked from past to vivid present and into the past again as the picture faded. "At that time I passed through the hills that rise up behind the Channel Waters. I was two days out from Santa Barbara, meaning to go no nearer, for I had heard a waif word that they had a fever there. The Indians were afraid and ran to the mountains, but the pestilence camped upon their trail. I went still in the wood and kept close, for I had no wish to meet with them. Toward the end of one day I heard afar off a strange mewling cry. Up to that time I have thought to know the cry and the talk of all creatures in the wood, but this is new to me. All that place was thick with flowering scrub, making slow going. I kept on in it, following that cry, for I am a fool and know not the cry of my own kind. It grows dusk, and I come out at last in a cleared place under a madrono, and see something move on the grass which makes that cry. I look and find it is a babe. *Sacre dam!* Well, I look about, and across the open place is a dead woman. One sits beside her that has her head sunken on her

knees, her hair is fallen forward and has ashes smeared upon it. I am not sure she is not dead also, but I put my hand upon her and she looks up. I think she has the fever upon her, but presently she makes the sign to me for food, and I see that she is starved. I had not the speech of the Channel Indians, but she had a few words of Spanish, and we made out with that. After she had eaten she crawled to the child and put it to her breast, and so told me a little of her condition. She was of the Mission Santa Barbara, she and the dead woman, her sister, and five others who had come away from the plague. They had tried the God of the Padres, but now that the sickness had come on them they knew that it was not good. So they would go back to their own gods, but the Wrath followed them. Her sister had sickened, and the rest of the party had run on in a greater fright. But Juana, my woman, stayed by her sister three days until she died. Now she said she would not go back to the Padres lest the anger of her gods should bring a worse thing upon her. The God of the Padres, she said, was a great God, but He could

not keep off the fever. It may be so; myself I have no god. I take my chances with the beasts of the field; gods are for women and priests. Well, I buried the dead woman, and Juana, when she had eaten again, followed on my trail with the child ravening at her shrunken breast; for I said, if the fever will not drive her from her sister, will she not be faithful to me?

"What else?"

Lebecque left off his story to sit with his hands between his knees; all that showed of him was the red spark of his cigarette winking in the dark. Outside the moon, nearing her prime, flooded the swale, and made a long bright splash through the door, but no smallest ray pierced the tight roof of leaves. The dogs whined in dreams upon the floor, no shrill night insect rippled the silence, no leaf stirred the surface of the great lake of light that lapped this lonely isle of shade.

Delgado began to move uneasily.

"The child?" he said.

"Oh, the child!" The old man fell into the drone of reminiscence. "It was a puling brat;

I saw soon enough that it was no Indian, but I supposed its father might have been one of the *gente de razon;* but as I have said, the woman and I had not much speech together. I was so much the better suited. I saw that Juana wished not to go near the Mission again, and thought it was for fear of the Padres, but afterward I understood that it was on account of the child. By degrees, when the girl was growing up, she told me about it. Juana's husband was employed at the Presidio, and they did not live in the Mission. They had a child, and a sister of my woman worked at the house of one of the officers. When the fever came on Juana lost her husband and child, and at that time her sister bade her not let the fountain of her breast dry up, as her mistress was about to become a mother, and there was reason to believe she could not nurse her child. Afterwards her sister came in the night, for the child was born untimely, and the mother had the plague. They laid a vow upon her never to tell from whence she had the brat, nor to speak its name. So when they came away to the mountains, for the mother died, her sister put a

double vow upon her never to tell, never to speak the name; and she never did.

"But did you never think?"

"Think! What should I think? I had my traps to think of. Juana, I know, thought it a love child, whose portion was disgrace. I remember she said the lady's husband was from home. But at the last my woman was troubled in mind in her dying sickness; it was then she told me most; she wished to have a priest, but before an Indian could be found to fetch one she was dead."

"And the child?" insisted Delgado.

"The child. Yes. As she knew her to be baptized, Juana would never give her another name, only such foolish woman's talk as Sweetwater, Bright Bird, Honey-flower; but as she grew and proved to have a pricking tongue we called her the Briar. It was a good name. Well, she grew into a slim maid, and a month since I sent her to Monterey to the Father President."

"The Father President is at Carmelo," said Delgado. "But were there no marks, nothing by which she should be known?"

"There was a packet, papers, I think, but in the Spanish, which if I make shift to speak I have no skill to read. She is in Monterey by now."

That was as much as Lebecque would say and as much as Delgado wanted. He itched to be on the road. If the girl had gone to Saavedra, she would by him be made known to Castro, and the young man lose that advantage. He must be forward now with his corroborative narrative if he wished to continue in the affair. There must be two or three young men in Monterey ready to pay court in any promising quarter if Delgado were not there with his modish airs to put them out of countenance. He was silent a long time, considering his advantage. As for Lebecque, it had given him a start to learn that the girl had not been heard of in Monterey, particularly that he had gotten out of the young man unawares that Escobar had arrived, and Delgado had met him there. If the girl was Castro's daughter, and, putting the young man's account with his, it looked to be a fact, why had not the papers revealed it? Long practice of

cunning against suspicious creatures of the wood had made the trapper cunning with his own kind. Escobar had not known when he left the Grapevine that El Zarzo was a maid. But how if he had found it out? Or Saavedra might be keeping the girl in the background for jesuitical purposes of his own. Priests, thought Lebecque, might be caught at such tricks. Again, it might be that the packet had told nothing, or that the girl, who was not without wit, might have reasons of her own for keeping a still tongue. The old trapper had knowledge that the girl would not be helped by Delgado's knowing that she had traveled up to Monterey with Escobar in a boy's disguise, — good enough reason for saying nothing. Better reason, if reason were wanting, in not knowing how matters really stood with the girl. More business was marred by too much talking than by too little. The trapper shrugged his shoulders, and next morning watched Delgado strike out toward the Mission road, and San Antonio de Padua, where he would sleep the second night. Lebecque was glad to see him go. Since El Zarzo had left him the old

trapper had the minding of the flocks, and found it little suited to a man of his quick and restless habit. His natural grumpiness, startled out of him by Delgado's news of the night before, returned upon him with the light, and prompted him to one rankling shaft which, though it was directed toward establishing the girl's identity, was planted in Delgado's mind.

"Señor," he said, when Delgado was up in saddle, and the flock fretting for the start, "if the girl is not immediately found, inquire of Señor Escobar; he may be able to tell you somewhat."

"Now, what in the saint's name do you mean by that?" cried Delgado; and he was half in mind to stop and force an explanation; but the blether of the sheep rose up and cut off his words.

Escobar, working across the hills by a little-used trail, failed to meet Delgado, and dropped from it into the cañon of the Grapevine the day following, in the early afternoon. Lebecque was out with the flock. Isidro sat in the shadow of

the hut, and recalled how he had first seen it and in what company. As often as he thought of the Briar his heart warmed toward the lad, — always the lad, — never the cold, still girl by the pomegranate hedge in San Antonio. Toward evening he heard the sheep working up by the creek, — soft bleating and the barking of the dogs, mixed with the noise of the water roaring out of the gap. It served to cover the light, accustomed step of Lebecque as he came around the corner of the hut and stood looking down at him with beady, querulous eyes. The contained, curt speech of trappers and mountaineers, and such folk as live much out of doors, is not always to be accounted for as lack of breeding, but rather the gain of that swift sense that seizes upon realities. Not requiring the accustomed approaches of polite greetings, Lebecque did not use them. His glance took in the handsome, indolent length of the young man, and much more beside. Said he: —

"What have you done with her?"

"Married her," said the youth.

"By the Sacrament?"

"By the offices of Holy Church," said Isidro.

Said Lebecque, "When?"

"Yesterday at Mission San Antonio."

"Where is she, then?" asked the old man.

"There, at San Antonio."

"And you — are here" —

Lebecque looked him up and down. Then he took off his cap, which was of wild skin with the tail hanging down; he made a low bow.

"Señor, permit me," he said; "you are a beautiful fool." With that he turned heel and was off to his flock. Isidro's good humor was proof against this. He smoked cigarettes and waited for the sun to go down. Lebecque came back after a while and raked up the ashes of his fire.

"Since when have you known her a maid?" said he.

"Since Mascado ran away with her."

"What — what! Did he dare? The rascally half-breed, the" — Lebecque's epithets were, no doubt, permissible in his time. He choked and gasped. "Did he harm her? Did he lay hands on her?"

"I saw to it that he did not."

"Tell me," said Lebecque.

Isidro gave him an account of the affair at Las Chimineas. The old man shook with laughter between fits of rage.

"But you did wrong, señor; you should have killed him," said he.

Isidro let him believe that he had first discovered the boy to be a girl in the meadow of the chimneys. Now that she was his wife he shrank from mentioning the encounter with Delfina.

Lebecque warmed to him so much for his victory over Mascado that he out with Delgado's story and his own, putting them together convincingly. Isidro took it all easily enough, as one accustomed to the favor of gods; no doubt he thought he deserved it. His marriage took on the color of romance, to which his facile mind shaped itself. He began to picture how he should deliver the girl to the Comandante, with what circumstance and what an air. Lebecque, watching him, began to snort with impatience.

"Señor," he said, "permit me again; you are a fool. Here is Don Valentin gone to Monterey

with the news to spread it all abroad. Here are you departed, by your own account with scant leave, into the hills with the girl. Who knows that she is still a maid? Who knows that you have married her, — and deserted her at the altar? You, also, by your own account, in the way of being a priest! All Monterey will be humming like a hive. Think you Castro will thank you for this, or Saavedra? Best get you back to your wife and to Monterey with all speed. By the mass, but you will find a hornet's nest if you are overlong on the road."

Escobar saw the force of that. If he would make this marriage perform the service he intended in saving the girl's good name, he must be forehanded with his news. By the break of day he was out with Arnaldo beating about for a trail which should take them a short cut to Monterey. His wife he thought safe in person at San Antonio. To save her reputation he rode to Saavedra at Carmelo.

XIX

THE CAPTURE

FROM Peter Lebecque's hut and the Cañada de las Viñas Isidro and the tracker climbed up steadily by the swelling hill-front, seeing the isle of vines dwindle and shrink at the bottom of the swale. The spring, which had been a lusty beauty when Isidro rode first through that country, was now running fast to seed. No rains would come that way again for a good three quarters of a year. Wild oats and alfilaria curled sun-cured on the eastward slopes; stubbly growth of shrubs on the west, favored a little by far-blown dampness of the sea, hinted at their ashy midsummer hue. Streams rippled shallowly at the fords; young of wild creatures of that season's litter began to run freely in the chaparral. The trail went sidling on the flanks of the hills, and at each upward turn flung them a wider arc of boss and hollow,

drowned by a blue mistiness that thickened on level mesas to the waters of mirage. The crests of the hills were mostly bare to the windy flood of cooler air, but a wood of oaks, buckeye, and madroño swept about their bases and lapped upward in sheltered coves along the water courses. Their outlines showed dim and indistinguishable through the haze, like clumps of weed at the bottom of full, still bays of sea water. Out of one of the pools of leafage which lay below them, and yet overlooked in its turn a considerable stretch of sunken rolling land, rose up a column of thin smoke, pale against the dark blueness of the wood.

"Indians at last," said Isidro. "I began to think it true, what I heard at San Antonio, that they had left this country to harbor with Urbano in the Tulares. And look, another." Faint and far the second wisp of smoke rose up straightly and fanned out into the still atmosphere. The next turn of the trail showed them a third.

"Signal fires," said Arnaldo. "Now what the devil will they be about?"

By the middle of the hot morning the riders

had sighted five pillars of white smoke that neither increased nor grew less, but welled up from steadily tended fires, wagged a little at the impulse of an unfelt wind, broke high up against a level of cooler air, and rolled out along the sky. Later in the day Arnaldo pointed out a party of Indians in hunting gear on the trail below them, but when the two men came up to the place the hunters had melted like quail into the chaparral.

They rode all that breathless morning, following the looping and sagging of a shallow trail, but in the main rising toward the crest of the Santa Lucia, and then lay by for a long siesta while the horses fed. They made it long by intention, purposing to ride by the light of the moon, which was nearing its prime and rose early on the red track of the sun. With this in mind they kept saddle in the pure pale twilight of high altitudes, and on until the full yellow orb rose up and walked along the hills.

They rode through a longish shallow valley, open in the middle by a blind sunken water course, but having a thick strip of wood along the bases of the hills. Shortly before moonrise, while

the earth under foot still melted into dusk, and the sky whitened to the nearing light, they became aware of a flutter and a hint of motion, a whisper and beat translating itself to the sense without sound. It came out of the wood ahead of them on their right; it seemed to roll along the earth, and underlaid, yet was a part of, the multitudinous small noises of the night. It grew as they gave it attention, and came sensibly from a close-grown tongue of wood that ran into the open hollow, and resolved itself into a wailing croon, supported by a soft pounding pulse of sound. The wail flared and waned and fell off like the flame of wood fire, glints of which began to show between the close stems of trees. The padding was muffled and incessant. The two men dropped their spurs on the saddle-bow; they crept forward until they found a peephole in the screen of leaves. In a cleared grassy place lit by a brush-wood flare figures came and went like puppets in a showman's box. Figures of Indians, naked except for trappings of beads and feathers and stripings of gaudy-colored earths. Huge coronets of feathers of the chaparral cock, the *corredor*

del camino, surmounted their heads and streamed down the naked backs. They wore kilts woven of fine feathers of water fowl; necklaces of beads, bears' claws, elks' teeth, and bits of bright shell hung down over painted ribs and glittered intermittently with flashes of the fire. The earth under their feet was beaten to an impalpable dust.

"Big Medicine," whispered Arnaldo under the click of rattles and the steady drum of heels. Flashes from the fire showed, besides the dancers, circles of squatting savages whose spirits, raised by the hypnotic movement and beat of the ceremonial dance, fluttered in their throats. Arnaldo the tracker drew Isidro softly by the sleeve and backed away toward the horses.

"What do you think?" whispered Escobar.

"Devil's work," said Arnaldo, and crossed himself as a good Christian; after which he delivered himself as a man of sense. "It is not the time of their regular dances. If they do it now it is because they have some business afoot."

"Think you they were Urbano's men?"

"Who else? One was the renegade Manuel; I knew him; and he that had the feather coat on

his shoulders was a Channel Indian. Three others were Tuolomnes. Where else will you find the slum of all the tribes except with Urbano? They are not drawn together by love of each other, but for love of mischief."

"What can they do?"

"Set on some silly shepherds with their sheep, run off a few of the Mission beeves, entice a few neophytes from the Missions." Arnaldo had not a great opinion of the native tribes of Alta California. They let the priests sit too easily on their necks, and were frightened by the popping of firecrackers.

The two men rode on in the trail, and the moon rose new washed from the sea. The trail lay mostly in open ground and was not hard to seek. Twice in the fringe of the woods they saw lights low and twinkling on the ground.

"We must by all means keep on until we have crossed the ridge out of this country," said Arnaldo. "To-night they are busy with dancing, but to-morrow they may take a notion to stop us, particularly if they mean raiding in the direction of Soledad or Santa Cruz."

Isidro had no mind for such an interruption to his affairs. They kept on after this until they struck the wood again and the beginning of rising ground. Here they dismounted, for the trees were low and grew all abroad with gnarly boughs. The trail went faintly among them with many windings. Isidro whistled softly to himself while the tracker puzzled out the way.

"No noise, señor," said the tracker. Isidro stopped short. They went on for a quarter of an hour in the hot dark. Outside of the fence of trees the earth was gloriously light. Arnaldo began to halt at intervals and make signs of listening.

"Heard you anything?" he whispered.

"A cricket chirp and a wakeful bird."

"Nothing else?"

"Nothing else."

"Move on a little."

Presently Isidro heard. Out of the dark a slow padding on the fallen leaves seemed to follow them. They stopped, it stopped; they went on, it began again,— a mere whisper of sound.

"Man or beast?" Isidro asked.

"*Dios sabe*," shrugged the Indian. They went on steadily for another quarter of an hour and heard no more of it.

"It must have been a bobcat or cougar," said Escobar.

"Perhaps so; keep as much in the shadow as you may."

Where the wood was thin and straggling it was clearly no night for men who must make way cautiously to be abroad in. Rounding a blunt cape of hills they came suddenly on a camp of a dozen savages asleep, or smoking and a-doze. Arnaldo's horse knew the trick of stillness following a certain touch on his shoulder; but the other, winded a little, for the ground rose steeply, drew in his breath until the saddle-girth creaked. Several of the Indians sat up alert, but a ruffle of wind among the leaves smothered all smaller sounds and covered the retreat of the horsemen. Now they were forced out of the trail and went heavily through the brush, smelling trouble on all sides. A group of ponies feeding in a meadow snorted recognition to their horses, and got a smothered whinny in return. Arnaldo swore.

Isidro, never so merry as when he had need of all his wits, laughed under his breath.

"No laughing matter," said the tracker; "there must be threescore of the swine hereabouts. They might object to you getting on to Monterey."

"What will we do?"

"What we can; just ahead of us is a good level stretch; make the most of it."

They put their horses at a jogging trot; this lasted until the close growth of scrub and trees forced them to a slower pace. Instantly the long padding tread came out of the dark, following. It was light on the grass, but not so light that no twig snapped under it and no leaf rustled. Now and then they heard the swish of a bent bough springing back to place.

"Bungling work," said the tracker; then he laid hand lightly on the other's arm. Forward a stone-cast, the moon glinted on what was neither leaf, nor bark, nor stone. Across the grass the broken and dappled light through the latticed shadow of the trees was cut off and reappeared as under a sliding screen.

"The devil!" said Isidro.

"Evidently," shrugged the tracker.

The wood was full of hints of presence, sense of movement, little prickings of the flesh, uneasy sniffs of the horses. The trail ran here in an easy swale narrowly between two great bluffs of stony earth. The wood, pinched to a file of scant-limbed pines, ran between them and spread into a pool of dark beyond. The defile, opening toward the moon, was searched and rifled by the light. It was not a bowshot wide from wall to wall. Beyond this a little way lay an open country affording no cover for spies and the chances of swifter travel for the horses. Riding toward it Isidro and the tracker started a herd of deer, does with young fawns, feeding by a spring. The does threw up their heads to snuff the tainted wind and began to trot steadily toward the pass. But here their fine sense served them, and the men behind them, an excellent turn. At the mouth of the defile they swerved, halted, and wheeled, struck a brisker pace, avoided the pass, and disappeared in a dry gully toward the hills.

"Where the deer will not go there is no going for us," said Arnaldo; "wait."

He flung off his horse into the thickest shadow. Isidro held both bridle reins and waited, heard a night bird call and the wind tread lightly on the creaking boughs of pines, saw the shadows shrink as the moon rode higher, saw small furry things come out in the light and play; at last saw the tracker rise up out of the dark without a sound.

"Well?"

"Señor, you wish to get to Monterey with all speed?"

Isidro thought of the case in which he stood, — of his breach of behavior to Saavedra, of Delgado hurrying to the Comandante, of Delfina — "By the mass, yes!" he cried.

"Do as I say, then," said Arnaldo; "the moon is too much for us." He led the horses with unconcern back to the spring where the deer had been drinking and threw off the saddles.

"Make as if to camp," he said, "and lie down as if to sleep, but do not sleep; keep your pistol close."

They lay down to watch the ebb of the moon-

light and the slow oncoming of the tide of shadow that reached its flood some hours before dawn. They heard no more of any Indians, but no deer came that way, by which they judged there must be men about in the cañon below them and in the pass above. When the moon was low and the black splotches of forest began to run together in the bottoms of the cañons drenched in shadow, they began to move again with incredible stillness, drawing out of the wood toward the bare slopes of hill up the gully by which the deer had gone. Nothing moved behind them but the light wind in the leaves; before them they had the steep tireless scarp of the hill. They would ride a little, and then Arnaldo would quest forward on his feet a little, exploring the way, incredibly tedious, but they had no serious impediment. Once Isidro's horse struck a loose stone that went rolling and rattling to the bottom of the hill with a small avalanche of coarse gravel and set their hearts pounding with apprehension, but no alarm followed it. They came at last to open country about moonset, found it firm under foot and admitting of some speed. They

began to go down presently, and by dawn had come to clumps of thin pines and dwarfish oaks. They rode and saw deer bedded unstartled in the fern, and all the ease of wild life, warrant that no men had lately passed that way. A million wild pigeons began to stir and voice the bluish light of dawn; their calls and the incessant rustle of their wings rolled together like soft thunder among the trees. The two men pushed their jaded horses, breakfasting, without lighting, on jerke of wild venison which they had from Peter Lebecque, reached the foot of the grade, struck the level of a valley, crossed it three hours after sunrise, and in the hot palpitant forenoon began to wind and turn in the intricate shallow cañons of low hills. They had come upon no camps nor fresh trail of Indians, saw no signal fires nor any sign of pursuit; not so much as a crow flapped or a jay squawked suspiciously away from the trail.

"The rogues are behind us," said Arnaldo, "we have thrown them off our trail; nevertheless, we must get on to Monterey. We shall have a word for the Comandante."

"What word?" said Escobar, thinking of his own affair.

"There were no women among them. Some of them had guns; they have been trading with the Russians. It will take more than holy water to keep these bears away from the calf-pens of the Padres," Arnaldo chuckled.

"Do you think they are for San Antonio?"

"That or Soledad; they might reach either easily from where they are now camped. They may have accomplices among the Mission neophytes. The word that has gone about that the Padres are to be sent out of the country has bred maggots in their heads."

"And what," said Isidro, "if that word were true?"

"Eh," said the tracker, "they are swine; they will return to root in the earth where they were bred."

"They have been made Christians, and the Padres have taught them to save their souls from hell," said the young gentleman, who still had thoughts of becoming a padre himself.

Arnaldo showed a dry and twinkling mirth.

"Manuel," he said, "was a Christian. I remember an Easter when he served the mass. That was he you saw last night, with the rattle of ram's horn and a bear's teeth grinning on his shoulders."

They were both beginning to weary of the ride. The horses drooped and looked hungrily at the grass by the water courses. The air in the close little cañons was still and hot.

"*Dios!* but I could sleep," cried Escobar, yawning.

"Sleep, then," said the tracker; "here is feed for the horses."

They unsaddled, set the horses to the stake rope, crept themselves under the low screen of a live oak that dropped its branches to the ground. The hills were sunk in a midday drowse. That was a time when, except for some such seldom mischance as had fallen to them the night before, a man might lie down and sleep under any tree in Alta California, and take no account of risk or time. As the mood of the land never swayed much between the extremes of heat and cold, fury and calm, it bred even in its savage races

an equable and tractile mind. If the Franciscans found great scope for material advantage they found little for martyrdom. It is a tradition that bullocks' blood went to the cementing of adobe foundations, but little was shed of another sort.

Isidro and the tracker had expected no harm the night before but an annoying detention and interruption to the former's affairs; therefore they slept heavily, that danger over, and woke past noon to find Mascado sitting over them, very still, with Escobar's pistols laid across his knees.

XX

IN WHICH JACINTA RIDES TO MONTEREY

THE Franciscans of Alta California in the year when Isidro Escobar should have begun his novitiate sat tight, kept the affairs of the Missions in close order, and prayed or plotted, as their vocation lay, against the decree of secularization. The prayers, it seemed, found no advocate. The plots, like that of Saavedra's for turning the family of Escobar to priestly use, took a color, perhaps, from the lotus-eating land, were large and easy and too long in execution. For the most part they kept a quiet front in California, and trusted to the Brotherhood in Old Mexico. At that time of tedious communication it was hardly possible for the Padres of the Missions to know how nearly their college of San Fernando was demolished by the unfriendly Republic. The possibility of swift revolution that

harbors in Latin blood, their faith in St. Francis, strengthened by long immunity amid conflicting decrees, prompted to a cheerful view; but being, on the whole, accustomed to let no event meet them unprepared, they made ready for secularization, in case they found no way of avoiding it, according to their several notions. It was believed in some quarters that the Franciscans were converting the herds and flocks into coin, which was sent out of the country; it was known that others went about fitting the neophytes for the change by new and tremendous labors, or by larger freedom and greater responsibility. These are the pipes of history, the breadth of whose diapason sets many small figures going to various measures like midges in the sun. They go merrily or strenuously, with no notion of how they are blown upon; but let the great note of history be stilled, and they fall flat and flaccid out of the tune of time. If you would know how Demetrio Fages and the Comandante, how Isidro and Mascado, Peter Lebecque and his foster child, called the Briar, played out their measure, you must know so much of the note of their time.

Chiefly, then, you will understand how Saavedra, being troubled and a little offended at Isidro's disappearance immediately following the Father President's great labors in his behalf, could not on that account delay his annual visit of counsel and inspection to the Missions, where affairs stood in the case I have stated.

When Padre Saavedra left his conference with Castro he looked about first for the young man, and learned that he had last been seen walking upon the beach below the town. The Padre himself started in that direction, saw only the children racing with the tide, took a turn about the streets, and saw nothing of the young man, sent Fages, still nothing; whereupon he concluded that Isidro had preceded him to Carmelo, and leaving his secretary to attend to some small matters, rode back to the Mission. Here the Padre's slight annoyance grew into a measure of unease as the day passed and no Escobar. At noon, when the Indians came up from the field, he learned that two hours since the youth had sent for his horse and saddle; reminded by that of the lad Zarzito, he sent to seek him in the hut of

Marta, and learned that nothing had been seen of him since the evening before. The report served to give an edge to the Father President's alarm. Then about the hour of vespers came the secretary choked with news; he could hardly deliver it at once, turning and smacking it upon his tongue. He had been with Delfina, and learned things of Escobar that fell in pat with his own desires. Fray Demetrio had a dull sort of climbing ambition, which he thought threatened by the proximity of the young gentleman, and had the natural gratification of the baser sort of men in seeing others brought down. As he stood twiddling his thumbs in the presence of Padre Saavedra, his expression of pained virtuosity would have done credit to the wooden image of a saint.

Señor Escobar, he said, had last been seen riding eastward from Monterey in company with Arnaldo the tracker.

"Heard you anything of his errand?"

The secretary cast up his eyes. "It is thought," he said, "that he rides upon the trail of that brand of the burning, Zarzito."

"Ah yes, the Indian lad; what of him? He has not been seen since last evening."

The Padre's tone was one of gentle wonderment. Fages took his opportunity deliberately, watching from under cover of his stubby brows.

"Your Reverence," said he, "it is shown by the most credible of all testimony, an eye-witness in fact, that El Zarzo was taken forcibly and carried away by an Indian yesterday at dusk from the beach below the calabozo. It is further averred that Señor Escobar has gone in search of them."

Saavedra revolved this for a little space; he was not one to make gossip with an underling.

"Señor Escobar was concerned for the lad's soul," he said at last, "and his zeal outrunneth discretion. But strange that an Indian should by force carry off another Indian, especially a lad."

"Especially," said the secretary, "if a lad." The turn of his voice upon the supposition was slight but pregnant. Saavedra put out his hand. His instincts were quick; perhaps he had seen Fages at mischief before now.

"Demetrio, Demetrio, Demetrio," he said, three times, and the first was the cry of his heart

to be spared unhappy news, the second was a priestly reproof against malice, the last a command.

The secretary understood that he was now free to deliver all Delfina's adventure, a little colored by the tone of the minds through which it passed. The shame of the whole relation he took for granted; as, in fact, did the Padre; as any one of that time must have done. Saavedra was both hurt and sick; such duplicity, — to make himself a warrant for the girl's lying at his door, the pretense of concern for El Zarzo's soul; let alone his sacred calling, the boy's breeding should have saved him from such an offense to hospitality, — the case for Escobar was black enough without that. Walking out in the garden with his deep concern, he passed the hut of Marta, and paused before it.

"My daughter," he said, "how long have you known that El Zarzo is a girl?"

The woman looked up with something quick and apprehensive in her eyes. "Padre, from the beginning," she said; going on defensively, answering the rebuke of his gaze, "she was newly

from the hills, she brought me news of my son. I had not seen him for two years," she finished simply.

The Padre turned away, pacing slowly between the vineyard and the pears, baffled and hurt at heart.

The next day, with no further inquiry about Escobar and no message left for him, Saavedra started toward Santa Cruz, to visit the missions that lay northward. By so doing he missed meeting with Delgado, who came up from San Antonio two days later with the young wife of Escobar in his train.

Valentin Delgado could be trusted not to miss a pretty girl anywhere, much more if he found her where he had looked to find only priests, a corporal, a private soldier or two, and some hundreds of Indians. He saw her first in the evening glow walking in the pomegranate path of the Mission San Antonio where he had put in for the night. A light wind shaped her clothing to her young curves as she walked, the rebozo had fallen back from her head, her hands were folded at her throat. Delgado arranged his cloak, set

his hat a-cock, and sought Padre Tomás. In an affair of ladies he judged the round priest the better man. But what he heard put all thoughts of gallantry out of his mind. The slim crescent beauty was no señorita, but the Señora Escobar. That was the name that pricked all Delgado's wits forward. "If you do not find her," said Lebecque, "ask Escobar."

The whole story of the virgin marriage gushed from Padre Tomás of the Stripes like a living spring, a strange thing to tell and a new ear to hear it, following on a comfortable meal! He had not enjoyed himself so much for a long time. The hour enticed to companionable talk; Indians in the cloister began to croon a hymn. The young straight figure paced up and down by the pomegranate hedge that stood out sharply against a saffron sky. Delgado drained the Padre dry of news, learned how the girl was no maid, being married, and no wife, being deserted at the church door; went so far as to be sure that the Padre was sure the marriage was a cloak for no unchastity, but no farther. Padre Tomás knew nothing back of the hour when Isidro and the

girl came riding out of the wood; or, if he knew it, kept it under the seal of the confessional. The young man did not, therefore, open his own budget at that time. He must know how Escobar came by the girl; was she the same reared by Peter Lebecque's Indian wife in the hut of the Grapevine, called, because of her pricking tongue, "the Briar"? The Padre helped him there.

"And she had not even a name, this beautiful one; yes, she is beautiful; even I, a poor brother of St. Francis, can see that; so we wrote in the register the name of her foster father, Lebecque, nothing more. The young man was to bring a name on his return; that was the purpose of his going, that and some business with the Father President. So I understood. But it was most irregular; Padre Carrasco was of the opinion that I should have withheld the sacrament. But I hold that since the girl was plainly a Christian she must have had a name, though it was for the time mislaid, as you might say."

Still Don Valentin kept his thought, — took a whole night, in fact, to set it out in his mind. By morning he had it shaped thus: that, not to

be balked of all reward, he would take the girl to her father; and, as for the unconsummated marriage, there might be more doing. The girl was still her father's ward, — under age, married without his consent, — ravishment, married out of her name, — false pretense, only half married at that; no knowing what might come of it. The first thing was to get her out of the way of Escobar, who deserved it for being a fool.

Soon after the hour of compline he set Padre Tomás's ears tingling with more news than he had heard during his incumbency of San Antonio. Here, as at Peter Lebecque's, he told his story very much to the point, and so convincingly that within half an hour he had the girl in to hear it in the Padre's parlor, where the chief furniture was plaster saints in niches blackened by candle smoke. She came stilly, keeping close by the wall, a little pinched about the mouth, but with level eyes, young limbs, lithe and quick, unaccustomed to the trammels of her dress. The corporal's wife had stuck a pomegranate blossom in the smoky folds of her hair; it served to warm a little the pure pallor of her skin.

"Eh, come, come, child!" cried Padre Tomás de las Peñas when he heard her in the corridor; "come and see what we have for you; come and hear a tale. Ah, ah! Our Lady and St. Francis have been working for you. Is it a name you lack? Well, you shall have it, and not only a name, a most honorable name, but a family, a father in short, a notable and worthy parent, and not only a father, but a fortune, estates, immense! Ah, all this for a beautiful young woman who has already a handsome husband!" Delgado looked at him rather sourly for this. The girl simply stared; the breath came through her parted lips like a child's.

"Sit down, sit down!" cried the Padre; "you shall hear." She sat on the edge of the carved bench boyishly. The corporal's wife trailed in her wake as a dueña, plumped down beside her, untangled a fat arm from her rebozo, and held one of the girl's hands. It was doubtful if Jacinta understood all the explanations, but she answered their questions plainly enough. She was the French trapper's foster child. She had known that the Indian woman was not her mo-

ther, but she would always call her so. It was her mother's wish that she should go dressed as a boy. In that fashion she had left Cañada de las Uvas a month back. So far she was docile and apt, but if they questioned her upon her life in Monterey, and how she came to be riding into San Antonio de Padua with Señor Escobar from an easterly direction, when Monterey lay north and west, then she fell dumb. Her Indian training wiped all vestige of expression from her face, set her eyes roving past the plaster saints and the candles, out of the deep casement toward the Mission fields. Curious as Delgado and the Padre both were, they had to let her be. The young man, watching, thought her not so much cold as childish, immature, a great beauty, and plainly a Castro. The puzzle of the last two days' work had drawn proud lines of pain such as he knew in the Comandante's face, knit the fine brows, and tightened the small mouth. The likeness came out wonderfully when one looked for it. But Don Valentin thought her what she was not, timid and awed by his splendid appearance. She looked not so much at him as at his em-

broideries and the turquoise in the cord of his sombrero. He thought her dazzled when, in fact, the little god of love had made her blind. The young man took a high hand, — the part became him, — showed letters from Castro delegating parental authority, required that the girl be delivered to him and by him to the Comandante. The Padre boggled at that; the lady had been left expressly in his charge by her husband. Husband, ah, husband, is it?

"A word in your ear, Padre; how can the young man be a husband and he a priest? If not actually beginning his novitiate, at least dedicate, bound." Delgado had heard that story at Monterey. "Did he not tell you at parting that he had business with the Father President? Ay, truly. What sort of a husband is it that leaves his wife at the altar, tell me that? In fact, the fellow dared go no farther." Under such skillful handling the marriage assumed the proportions of a crime with the Padre as accomplice. The young man checked off the points of offense as you have heard them. The Padre polished his rosy countenance until it shone with perplexity,

but it came to this, that he would do nothing without consulting his confrère Reyes Carrasco. Padre Carrasco being at that moment in the farthest precincts marking out cattle for slaughter, the business hung in suspense until the evening of that day, as was in keeping with the movement of that time, nobody suffering inconvenience on that account.

Padre Carrasco was as shrewd as dry. He came in with the skirt of his cassock tucked under his girdle, and gave it as his opinion that the lady's husband could not but be gratified by his wife's good fortune, and seeing he had already gone to the capital it could do no harm for her to meet him there; but, nevertheless, the lady should have her own free will to go or stay. Jacinta, when she was called to counsel, said very quietly that she would go to Monterey. It seemed to her the quickest way to Escobar.

"Señora," said Don Valentin on the road, edging his horse as near to her as the way allowed, "let me beg you to draw your rebozo closer about your face, otherwise I do not know

how we shall get to Monterey; your beauty sends my wits astray."

"In that case," said Doña Jacinta, "you had best ride a little distance forward."

"Useless," he said, pranking his horse across the trail; "the music of your voice draws me back again."

"So we shall get on faster if I do no talking," said she.

"Ah, cruel, cruel!" he sighed.

The lady was out of tune with such pointed blandishments. At the crossing of a brook he offered her drink from his own silver cup, though the strictest behavior owed the first attention to Señora Romero, the dueña.

"Drink, most beautiful," said the young man, "and no other shall drink after you."

"It would be a pity," said she, "on that account, to spoil so excellent a vessel." And she waited until the corporal's wife had done with her gourd.

"It is not for nothing you were called the Briar," said Delgado, and he put up his cup. Finding he made no way with her by compli-

ments, he left off teasing his horse, and talked of the family of Ramirez, their estates and fame, to which she listened with patience and collected looks. He had a guitar in his pack, a necessary part of a young gentleman's baggage, which he fingered skillfully, letting the bridle rein hang on the saddle-bow. It was a warm day livened by a damp wind. Westward a bank of roundish cloud reflected a many-tinted radiance from the sea. The rim of his sombrero made a half moon of shadow on his face as he tilted up his chin for singing; the light warmed his throat ruddily and glinted on the jewel in his hat. He sang an aria called "The Dove," and "La Nocha esta Serena," but got no notice from the lady until he struck into a little tender air of absent love, which Escobar had used to hum wordlessly under his breath. That fluttered her, as Don Valentin was quick to see, so he rode, singing, while the cavalcade jogged forward to the twanging of his guitar, well pleased with himself and revolving many things.

The trail ran from San Antonio de Padua to Nuestra Señora de la Soledad, with a branch run-

ning off toward Monterey, uniting again at Santa Cruz. Delgado, who had reasons of his own for prolonging the way, chose to go by way of Soledad, and Doña Jacinta made no objection.

XXI

A MEETING

ALL the splendid effects, it seems, are saved for nature's own performances, — sunset glow, long thunder of the surf, loud thunder of the hills, the poppy fires of spring, a white star like a torch to usher in a crescent moon; but men's great occasions go shabbily, out of tune, with frayed settings, cheapened by the hand that pushes them off the board. Events that the passions of a whole life lead up to come in with a swarm of small, stinging cares like gnats; compensations are doled out by halfpence.

For sixteen years the interests of the Comandante found nothing to fix upon, his affections no point of departure. The ichor of kindness curdled even in his dreams. It made him a martinet in discipline, and a friend merely of his friend's buttons. The habit of perfect behavior

put him through the motions of taking an interest in men, but there was plainly no heart in it; naturally this got him misunderstood. He was thought too cold to have cared greatly about his wife, but it was, in fact, the caring that had left him frozen. The renewed hope of his child had come upon him suddenly, and reached a marvelous growth. It was not that he wished more strongly to find her since she was the heiress of Ramirez, but when she was only Ysabel's child the hate of Ysabel had seemed to balk him in his search. For himself he had not the heart for going on with it, but Ysabel would have wished the girl to come into the inheritance. Therefore as he wished to please his wife, still personal and dear, the reasons which before had warded him off now led on. He had really believed his daughter dead all these years. It occurred to him now that this wanted proving at several points, — an excuse for hope. Then came the discovery of the certificate in the almsbox, and hope flared into conviction. She lived, bone of his bone, commingling of his flesh and that of the dearly loved. Ah, Christ! but he had done

something; her hate had not been proof against that, — made her body bud and bear fruit; struck a soul out of her soul as a spark is struck out of cold steel. His very thought at this point was choked and incoherent. He was in the exalted mood of a man hearing first that there is hope of issue of his love. He had thoughts, if Delgado's mission came to nothing, of resigning his command to make a pilgrimage through the inhabited coast of California until he should find her. And while he quivered with expectancy, Jacinta came in upon him in a manner least to be expected, with the advent of more than ordinary official pother and distraction.

It happened in this way: on the night that Valentin Delgado and his party lay at Mission Nuestra Señora de la Soledad, a band of twenty mounted Indians had descended from the hills, crossing the river above the Mission, and run off twice as many head of cattle from the Mission fields. It was surmised that the men must have been Urbano's following, rag-tag of all the tribes, their leader himself a renegade from Santa Clara, and late harboring in the tule lands about the San

Joaquin River. Small losses of cattle had been laid on his shoulders before, but on this occasion it appeared that he must have had an accomplice within the Mission. The theft was not discovered until after the hour of morning service, as late as nine o'clock, to be exact, which gave the marauders a good ten hours' advantage. It was true of the Franciscans that they not only preached peace and good will to the native Californians, but practiced it. Their conquest of five hundred miles of coast was accomplished almost without bloodshed, and maintained without soldiering, unless you gave that name to the corporal and two or three privates stationed at each community of five to fifteen hundred Indians. Six soldiers was a very large number to be employed at any Mission, and Soledad, lying nearest to Monterey and the Presidio, had only two. Immediately on the discovery, the corporal and his man, a deserting sailor who had enlisted to escape being forced to sea, with two trusted neophytes, set about tracking the plunderers, and a rider was sent to Monterey to the Comandante. This was a case in which the Padres could confidently expect military aid, for

if the Indians began to plunder the Missions unpunished they would not be kept long from the towns. The courier started at once, and half an hour later, a little delayed by the flutter at Soledad, Delgado and his party set out, riding leisurely and making a comfortable camp at noon.

Delgado was not so talkative as yesterday, considering how he would present the girl to Castro to put himself in the best light. It stuck in his mind that the month when the girl strayed about Monterey with Escobar, in boy's clothing, covered more than mere freakishness. Padre Tomás thought otherwise, — but the Padre also believed in miracles and holy water for bears. Privately he thought the fat priest a credulous fool. Don Valentin wished to marry the girl if it proved feasible; but though he could contemplate a marriage for advantage without love and not be singular in his time, he was too much sopped in the chivalric notion of his type to admit a wedding without honor. He held the girl's marriage with Escobar a knot to untangle, or a reasonable excuse for drawing back if she should prove in his estimation damaged goods.

The young man was not so sure if it came to a wedding it would be altogether without love. He had kindled a fire under his imagination with her romantic story, the glamour of her wealth and her promise of beauty. Lastly, he marveled to find her manners not so much unfit for her station as might have been expected. Something she had caught from Escobar, electrified by the fineness that made him adorable. But beyond that, the Indian woman, remembering whence the girl had sprung, had denied her own instincts to bring up the child in the image of the dominant race. By great pains and tremendous labors of an elementary mind Castro's daughter had been nurtured in an exquisite personality, — labors beyond her own power to divine, — so that afterward, when she had come to the prime of her charm and bodily beauty, she was pointed out and accustomed to believe herself fit for her exalted station chiefly by the prerogative of birth.

Jacinta's thoughts on this day of riding toward Monterey did not run so far back as the time of her foster mother, hardly so far forward as the home of her father; beginning, in fact,

with a day when a herd boy under an oak saw a glorious youth come out of the wood, driving Mariano's sheep. She understood how it was that Castro should be her father; she had seen him about the Presidio, and vaguely prefigured his relation to her; but her experience hardly afforded the stuff for imagination. She gathered from the corporal's wife that the rise in her fortunes must give her new value in her husband's eyes; but as she had never felt servility in the first estate she had no elation in this. Whatever her husband's disposition toward her, her passion was still too virginal to form a wish. In her first dream of their life together he should have been a priest rapt from the world, and she should serve him and lie at his door. Inasmuch as the circumstance of her birth jostled this dream, she found it vexatious and confusing, and she lacked material for shaping a new one. Chiefly she burned with the thought that as Escobar had said he would go to Monterey she would meet him there. The air was charged with the sense of his presence. She made scant answers to Don Valentin's curtailed compliments, each being

busy with thought; and the corporal's wife, having all the conversation to herself, made the most of it. So they rode until they heard the sound of the sea and dogs barking in the streets of Monterey.

Plain folk had not yet lost the zest of life in Alta California. Nearly all the town was out in the plaza, helping to make ready the detachment for Soledad with the joyous volubility and deft-handedness of the Latin race. Castro was settling a hornet's nest of small matters in his room with the balcony overlooking the sea.

In the midst of it, while he leaned his head upon his hand for weariness, there came a great knocking at the outer door, and a quarrel of voices, — his orderly's and another lofty and contained. He heard the babble fall off to a note of amazement and gratulation and the feet of his household running toward the door. The Comandante turned expectantly to meet fresh news from Soledad, and felt a warning precede it down the passage; a warmth and glow that settled at his heart, a presage of satisfaction. The bustle halted a moment outside his door, which, before

he had done wondering why the noise should be mixed with the sweep of women's skirts, was flung open by Delgado. The caballeros of that time loved flourishes; Don Valentin led the girl forward by her finger-tips, and swept up to the Comandante with a great bow.

"Your daughter, señor." Then he fell back in an attitude to note the effect.

Castro saw only a slim figure, straight and illy dressed, and his own chilled spirit looking at him out of the eyes, mouth, and brow of Ysabel, his wife. He grew rigid; his hand fluttered and strayed toward a drawer where certain papers lay with some cherished trifles of his wife's.

"Jacinta — Jacinta," he said whisperingly, for now he had the name by heart; and then, as the resemblance smote home to him, "Ysabel, Ysabel."

"Ah," cried Delgado delightedly, "you see a likeness?"

Castro got up drunkenly and went across to her; his breath was short and labored; all his motions dragged as with a weight. The girl stood still and cold; drooping now with fatigue,

her arms hung down straight at her sides. The Comandante took her by the shoulders and constrained her toward him. The room was close and warm; blue flies buzzed at the pane. Dust of travel, saddle weariness, the smell of provender and horse blankets being doled out in the quarters below, obsessed the sense of them all. The hour fell flat and dry. Castro began to work his lips, gray and trembling, but seemed not to understand that he brought out no words. Suddenly, jarring the stillness, rang out the trumpet call to evening drill, which Castro was used to have in charge. Military precision, the use of old habit, held and stood the Comandante in the stead of tears. They saw the motions of his face, and understood them for the excuses which he believed he had delivered. The man sank into the Comandante as a sword is dropped into a sheath. He turned stiffly and went out.

So the first hour which Jacinta passed in her father's house was spent sitting on a bench in the bare little room, with Señora Romero surprised into stillness, and Delgado walking up and down beside her.

The necessity of providing his daughter and her company a meal and beds steadied Castro, and carried him through an hour or two until he could hear Delgado's story. Jacinta admitted every point as far as it touched her knowledge, and recognized the packet as the one she had brought up from Peter Lebecque. But Castro needed no other warrant than her looks. Communication between them was still dry and unfruitful. He kissed her forehead only for goodnight, and she endured it.

The detachment, twelve men and an officer, got off for Soledad by sunrise, which for that time was unusual dispatch. The Presidio returned to its level round, and news of Castro's daughter began to spread about the town. But the two came no nearer each other. Jacinta was always at a window looking out, hungering amid the strangeness for a sight of Escobar ; restless, starting at small sounds, close upon the verge of tears, not recognizing her own state. Castro would be always edging in her direction, not enduring to have her out of his sight, and wondering at the dryness of his own heart. Toward the middle of the

afternoon he found her on the balcony with the rebozo off her neck for coolness, and he saw the cord that held the medal about her slender throat.

"What is this, daughter?" he said, with his hand upon her shoulder, yearning toward the proper intimacy of their relation and not daring much.

"I have always worn it," she said. "Juana told me it belonged to my baptism. I have never had it off."

Castro drew it out and held it in his palm, warm from her bosom. Then he knew it for Ysabel's, and thrilled to it as to living touch of her. He kissed it, murmuring to it broken words of endearment, and laid his head upon the railing before him, kneeling on the floor, and cried. The girl was in a mood to be touched by his grief; sick with longing, strange, tired with new habits, she began to gasp; tears filled her eyes, brimmed over and ran abroad on her cheeks as not having learned the way; filled and brimmed over as the pool of a rain-fed spring. Her father heard the drip of her tears on the floor, reached out and

drew her in; kneeling they sobbed together. Jacinta's tears were purely hysterical, but Castro mistook them; they mingled with his and washed the wounds of her mother's hate.

The Comandante began to be inordinately fond of his daughter, touched the earth only at the points that served her. He ransacked the shops, and obtained extraordinary trading privileges for a Yankee vessel on the mere intimation that it carried women's fardels for barter. Señora Romero was sent home with a handsome present, and the wife of one of Castro's lieutenants established Jacinta's dueña and adviser. Old Marta of the Mission Carmelo was brought over to be her personal attendant; it was the only preference the girl made in her new situation.

No one but the Indian woman and Delgado knew of the wedding at San Antonio, and their mouths were effectively stopped by self-interest, for this was the one thing at which Castro's gorge rose. Jacinta had told him very simply how it came about, — the capture, bondage, and delivery, Isidro's discovery of her sex, the young man's high airs, and the virgin marriage, — all

except the one important item that she loved him. A certain crisp manner of speaking and a boyish straightforwardness where one would look for blushes and tremors carried no information. The Comandante had the sense to see that if this story of boy's dress and Mascado ever got abroad, the marriage would prove the best cure for the girl's blown fame. He could appreciate Escobar's chivalry so far, but he stuck at the desertion. Was she good enough for bell and book, and not good enough for bed and board — the daughter of a Ramirez! — By the mass! Here he would fall to conning the insinuations of Don Valentin, to whom he was as extraordinarily grateful as he was fond of his child. Certainly there was reason enough for this unconsummated marriage to be set aside if reason ever was; and Delgado was the better match. Saavedra, when he returned from the north, would have something to contribute. Castro had dispatched letters asking to be relieved from his command, to accompany his daughter to Mexico in the settlement of the estate, and nothing need be arranged until that time.

As for Jacinta, she took all her new life alike, as the caged animal takes the cage and the hand that feeds it. She was very still, especially through the day, when she was under her father's hand. This was the manner of their life together: they would have chocolate in the patio of a morning; then, while her father left her for his official labors, she would go about the house with Marta, making great concern of the housekeeping, of which she knew very little. Castro would be running in and out all day to make excuse to see her. After the siesta she would sit for an hour or two with the lieutenant's wife, learning the mysteries of the toilet and needlework, of which she knew nothing at all. At the evening meal the Comandante sat long over his wine, sometimes in the patio, sometimes in the little balcony overlooking the sea. Then Don Valentin would come in and make conversation suited to ladies' company. He would bring his guitar and sing tender and passionate airs to which the girl was glad to listen. It was so she learned the phraseology of love. But when the house was shut and all lights out in the town, a

wood mood came upon her. She could not sleep within walls at any time, but had her cot brought out to the patio under a vine; there she would lie, and the Indian woman crouch by her head; or at times she would pace the length of her cage with inconceivably light tread, and always they would talk. Now they would say how it would be in the forest at that hour, and what would be doing at certain dark pools where the wood creatures came to drink, or what roots or berries were best at that season, and the virtues of certain herbs. Other times the girl would despoil herself of tenderness and babble of Isidro and the joy of their riding, riding in the pleasant weather; now it would be the slow open heath of Pastería with the shepherd fires and flooding moon; now a sudden small bluster of rain that sent them to shelter under a thicket where there was a smell of moist earth, and all the grass was wet; then the stony slopes of wild lilac that slapped the horses' flanks, and the sea fog drifting in. At times she fell sick with longing, lying dry-eyed and dumb; then it would be Marta who showed her straightly how a man's

love is taken and kept, and how a woman must give wholly without seeming to give all. Also it was ordained that as a man grew weary of kissing there would be young mouths at the breast to draw out that pain, so that if women had the worst of it in loving they had afterward the best.

"A lover is a great lord," she said, "but a son is a greater. Wait, most beautiful, till you have borne a son." The poor girl owned to herself there was little chance of that, and, in fact, she hardly asked so much. But the time wore on, and Escobar did not come. Then her pride began to be awake. She saw her father deeply fretted by Escobar's lateness, which he took for scorn. At last he ventured to speak to her of it, and once opened between them it was like fire out of cover. He perceived her hurt, which was really the wound of latent womanliness at being so lightly set aside, for she knew nothing of family pride and little of caste. It was enough for Don Jesús that she suffered at all, and he fumed accordingly.

All Jacinta's pride was not to be found wanting in anything befitting the wife of an Escobar.

If resentment was proper to her station, she must make a show of it at whatever cost. So she took arms against her love to make herself more worthy of her lover. In this she followed Castro's lead. It is fair to say that of Don Valentin's courting she apprehended not a whit. When her father hinted at the possibility of a dissolution of the marriage she assented, believing in her heart that so Escobar wished. Affairs, being in this posture, remained without alteration until at the end of ten days they had word from the detachment following the cattle thieves in the hills eastward from Soledad.

XXII

A WORD FROM THE MOUNTAINS

ONE allows to the flight of wild pigeons, darkening the sky for days, a prescience germinating singly in each bluish breast at the same hour, as gilias blow in instant myriads upon the spur of spring. Wild geese clang upward from the Tulares as recurrently as grapes ripen in the wood at the set time of the year; but when men begin to sway together, to move in companies and exhibit in widely scattered parts froth of the same churning desires, we are far to seek for the cause of it: usurpations, extortions, Pentecost or Judgment of God. It is all devil or Holy Ghost. So the Franciscans laid the mutinies, fallings off, and infringements of the savages to the first mentioned; even so the tribes braved themselves for such trespass by commerce with their disused gods. No doubt the god of the water-fowl and

the wood pigeons would have served as well in either case.

About the middle of the month of waning bloom the free Indians drew to cover in the stony winding gullies of the mountains, about forty true born and a half-dozen mestizos and mongrels, led by Urbano, who had Mascado for his right hand. They made medicine daily; smoke of council fires went up by night, and the click of rattles sounded through the wood with singing and exultation. The presage of their triumph rose like an exhalation from their camps, and settled over the Missions, where thousands of their blood had taken on the habits of a gentler life, swung censers for medicine sticks, had scapulars for fetiches, and prayed to the One God prefigured in a wooden doll. If the new faith went deeper it was not so deep that the roll of the ceremonial drums struck no chord under it. After the news of the skirmish at Las Chimineas, the neophytes kept close. By all accounts only rabbits and appointed couriers ran on the road between Soledad and Monterey, but the wood began to leak. Hints of distraction crept into

the Missions; old men had glittering eyes and talked cautiously in corners. Scraps of news with no mouth to father them drifted from Carmelo to the town and were guaranteed by courier two or three days later. It was whispered that Marta had news of her son, for whom she kept a candle burning before San Antonio and the Child. She went that day walking over from Monterey, and took away the candle from the little altar of Carmelo; she may have thought the saint inattentive, or perhaps that her son did well enough for himself where he was. She went straight to the blessed candle, snuffed it out, and hid it in her bosom. Unprecedented behavior! None saw her but an altar ministrant who dared nothing by way of interference; the chief's daughter had a commanding walk, and the manners of royalty grew upon her in those days. Her eyes were bleak with memories, at other times bright and hot. She would be about the house crooning old songs, and would fall into set, unconscious stares. Of evenings they heard her chant low and wildly when the moon was up and a light wind came in from the sea. The sound of her singing mixed

with the strumming of Don Valentin's guitar, and pierced Jacinta like a call from the wild. Then she wearied of love and its sickness, and would make occasion to slip away to Marta and talk of her life at the Grapevine before Escobar came. Out of sheer kindness she would recall hunting exploits of Mascado's, of which the older woman was greedy. There was much gossip of a hero-making sort afloat concerning him at Carmelo, where the Padres kept the smoke of incense going all day, increased the service of the mass, and had serious thoughts of attaching a penance to the singing of native songs. But the time drew on to the dark of the moon, when no dog howls and wolves will not run in a pack. The stir and the singing died, women grinding at the quern began to lift a hymn to the Blessed Virgin.

The soldiers were reported still following the cattle thieves, who were retreating eastward. Then came the news of a skirmish near the Arroyo Seco in which three soldiers were killed and two hurt. A few only of the cattle were recovered, for the Indians had parted them in three

bands and gone up from Soledad by divers trails. Many of the marauders had guns, for which it was surmised the Russian traders would be paid in the hides of stolen beeves. This was stirring news for a lotus-eating land. A new detachment from the Presidio got off at once ; Castro himself rode at the head of it. This satisfied a public sentiment, and his own sense of the seriousness of his position, which was great. It touched his honor to leave no loose ends of mutiny in his jurisdiction, since he had applied for and expected his honorable retirement. He drew heavily on the military resources of the province, and got away with twenty men provisioned for a month.

Saavedra came hurrying home from the north, and the same day came to him Delgado with his story of the wedding at San Antonio, and Pascual Escobar, ridden up from Las Plumas, demanding his brother from all the four winds. Word of Isidro's imprisonment and other extraordinary doings had penetrated so far, and the young man was jealous of the credit of his house. Saavedra put him off with soothing words until he had revolved how much of Isidro's story could be told

in fairness to all parties, and in the interim several things happened.

Affairs moved on much the same for Jacinta except that the lieutenant's wife sat with her evenings when Delgado came in with his guitar, and she, loving a lover as do most ladies, egged on the match with practiced art. Delgado was beginning to imagine himself vastly in love. Jacinta stirred a little to practice on him the arts in which she lacked no tutoring from her dueña.

Then Fray Demetrio, who had heard of this hedged young beauty whom one had no more than a glimpse of as she passed with her father in the promenade, bethought himself of sundry past kindnesses on the part of the lieutenant's wife, and made a ghostly call. The man was at all times inordinately curious, and had a fine taste for ladies' looks.

"She is not to be seen, brother, I assure you," said the dueña; "the Comandante was most strict; but to one of your holy calling, and an old friend — and you knew her mother, you say" — You may judge what exchange of compliments

had gone to the visit up to this point. "Well," said the lady, "when we cross the patio to look at the Castilian roses, look behind the vine there; we call it Jacinta's vine. That is she with her needlework lying in her lap. It is always so, I assure you, when I am not by. Look now and tell me if the likeness is as striking as reported."

Fages looked, choked, spluttered, came near to having an apoplexy, but had the wit to keep his tongue in guard.

"Ah!" cried the lady at the outer gate, "you find the resemblance extraordinary. So the Señor Comandante says."

"Extraordinary, my dear lady, is not the word; it is miraculous; not a feature lacking, even to the bent bar of her brows."

"But surely," said the lady as she let him out, "the eyebrows she has from her father. So I have understood."

Fray Demetrio went straight to Delfina. When those two worthies had their heads together there was sure to be gossip afoot. Within three hours Delfina came bustling about the quarters on a

dozen well-devised errands, pertinacious as a wasp until she had a good look at the Comandante's daughter, and went out humming with her news. By nightfall most matrons in the town knew that there was a reasonable supposition that Doña Jacinta was the same slim lad seen lurking about the Mission a month gone, with Señor Isidro Escobar, the same who had been carried off by an Indian, run after by one young man and brought home by another. By the next day they were sure of it, by the second it had reached the lieutenant's wife and Pascual Escobar.

Pascual flounced off to Saavedra in a great fume. He felt the occasion demanded that he should fight somebody; not Saavedra, since he was a priest, nor Jacinta, for she was a lady; but when Padre Vicente had told him the whole story as far as it was known to him, Pascual concluded it must be Delgado. From the start he would have taken to the young man immensely for his fine airs and sumptuous dress; had copied both and lost all his money to him at cards; but in view of what he purposed toward Isidro, —

nothing less than possession of his wife, — Delgado had rather shrugged off an intimacy with the elder brother.

Pascual found the young man in front of his lodging, fixing his saddle in perturbation, with scant allowance for courtesies.

"A word with you, señor," cried Escobar.

"Another time, señor; I have business in hand."

"I also, señor; my business is with you."

"I pray you hold me excused. I go upon a journey of great urgency."

"You shall go upon a longer one if you do not hear me speedily. My business is the duello. Will you fight?"

"With you? Wine of Christ! Yes, when I return, if your affair has not passed off in vaporings by that time." Delgado sprang to the saddle and struck into a tearing gallop. Escobar galloped after and drew level.

"Señor, I challenge you. You offend. You are courting my brother's wife. Will you fight?" The wind of their speed took the words out of his mouth.

"The devil!" cried Delgado. "You have heard that story!"

"I say again," panted Pascual, "will you fight?"

"Señor, can you ride?"

"Ride, ride!" cried Escobar. "Judge if I can ride." He cut his horse cruelly with the quirt and tore ahead. Delgado used the spur and came up with him.

"Then ride, señor, for if we make not good speed this day I know not how long you may have a brother. And as for his wife, I believe she has gone in search of him."

"Explain, explain!" cried Pascual, the words pounded out of him by the jar of their riding.

"Word has come to me that Don Isidro is in captivity with the Indians. His wife, if wife she is, is not to be found. I think she has gone to find him. The woman Marta is with her. I go to Castro. Now will you fight or ride?"

"Ride, ride," gasped Pascual, "if it is as you say, and afterward if need be we will fight."

"Have it so," said Delgado; and after that they saved their breath, and lent their minds to

the speed of the horses. They kept a running pace until they struck rising ground.

News of Isidro's detention in the camp of the renegades had come to Monterey from Soledad, where it was made known by a captive taken at Arroyo Seco. Marta had carried it straight to Jacinta.

"Sing, my bird of the mountain," she said. "I have a word for you. He is neither faithless nor unkind." Guess how the girl hugged that news, nursing it against her heart till it was warm with hope. Marta had known how to put tidings in a fruitful shape. She waited for the pang and the cry that followed in the wake of joy.

"But, Marta," she said, "Mascado?"

"What of him?" said the older woman.

"He is there with the Indians, next to the chief, you said. He will kill Señor Escobar."

"He will not dare," said the mother of Mascado.

"Ah, but you do not know. When we came away from Las Chimineas, as I have told you, when my — when Señor Escobar had taken him

with the riata and bound him, he looked at us as we rode away, — such a look! There he sat with his back to the tree and his knife on the rock before him; he looked from that to Señor Escobar and back again as if he would have drawn them together with his eyes, so great was his hate. There was death in his look. Ah, Marta, tell me what I shall do."

"But he has not killed him yet," said Marta.

"You do not know; the news is a week old. Mascado may not have seen him yet; they say the Indians are in three camps." The girl wrung her hands.

"Mascado would not dare," said his mother again.

But Jacinta fell to crying softly without noise or sobbing; then she would sit drawing counsel from her hope, and afterward the flood of grief would grow full and drip over in unrelieving tears. Marta made her *chili rellenos* for dinner, green peppers stuffed with cheese and fried, but the girl would take no comfort in them. So at last when the sun had licked up the shadow like damp from the patio, and the whole town lay

a-doze, Marta took the girl's hands between her palms and said her last word.

"Fret no more, my Briar," she said, "I will go and speak with my son."

"How will you go, Marta?"

"I can get a horse, and if any meet me in the hills I will say I seek my son. Mascado is a captain. They will not hurt me."

"But how will you know where he is?"

"I have a word, — a bird of the air brought it; never fear."

"And when you find him what will you do?"

The daughter of a chief drew herself up.

"What becomes me," she said.

"Ah, Marta, take me with you!"

"Most beautiful, what will you do in the hills?"

"I will go to my husband."

"There is war in the hills, and the tribes are bitter against the *gente de razon*."

"But if I am of the *gente de razon* I am also Indian bred. Seventeen years I myself knew no better." With such debates she followed the elder woman from room to room.

"What will your father say?" said Marta.

"What will he say to you whom he commanded not to leave me?" demanded the girl.

"Will you that I stay?"

"Ah no, no, — only take me with you."

There was another reason why Jacinta wished to get away from Monterey, one as deep as her desire and more inarticulate. By dint of many hints from the lieutenant's wife, the point of Delgado's compliments grew plain to her. Now she saw her father's drift, and what prompted his ire against Escobar. That tie dissolved, Delgado was to have her, to which her own quietude under her father's suggestion had in a measure committed her. All the simplicity of her forest breeding, which denies the approach of marriage to any feet but love's, and perhaps a wraith from Ysabel's unhappy grave, rose up to warn her dumbly. But it lay too deep for complaining; she could sense it, but not give it speech. All that afternoon she avoided her dueña and the needlework under plea of a headache, that she might find Marta among the cooking pots and pans, and with arms folded on the elder woman's knees make argument and persuasion.

XXIII

HIDDEN WATERS

RBANO, captain of the rag-tag of tribesmen, whose right hand was Mascado, was not the stuff of which new civilizations are made. That was about all there was behind his defection from Santa Clara. He and some dozens of his following wished not to live always in one place, wear clothes, marry one wife and stay by her; preferred to gather wild grapes rather than plant vineyards, to set snares for the wild fowl of the Tulares rather than raise barley for clucking hens; wished to have the wind on their faces, the stars over them, the turf under foot. There were some savages in his fellowship, chiefly mestizos, begotten upon Indian women by drunken sailors or convicts sent into the country to serve as soldiers; but of scalping, tortures, massacres, all the bloody entourage of traditional Indian warfare, they knew as little as of the

Christian virtues. They hated holy water, houses, field labor, stocks, the whipping-post, the sound of a church bell; and as much as the Padres stood for these things, hated them also. But they had really not much grievance. Some of them had been detained in the Missions against their will, and that is an offense upon any grounds. Some had been hunted by soldiers in hills where their fathers were mesne lords, and whipped for seeking every man's right to live in what place best pleases him; that was the full extent of imposition. The Missions never appropriated to their own use one half the lands claimed by the tribes they baptized, and since the Padres preferred raising cattle to hunting deer, the wild game increased without check. The remnant of the tribes, having more ground to hunt in than they could well cover, were not happy in it. They missed the excitement of tribal feasts and dances, feuds and border wars, the stir of a numerous people in large land.

So for sport they took to cattle-stealing, relishing the taste of Mission beef, and coveting the knives, beads, and ammunition which the Rus-

sians paid them for hides, pleased, no doubt, to harry the Padres on any account. Possibly they dreamed, as their numbers were augmented by success, of driving out the Franciscans and restoring the old order, for no better reason than that they wished it so. Beginning in a small way, running off two or three head of stock at a time, they grew in impertinences until they had planned and executed in full force the raid on Soledad, and so brought out the Comandante fuming from Monterey, and the ruin of their company.

Urbano, *El Capitan*, had deserved his election. He was shrewd, hearty, temperate, and expedient. Mascado, who had joined him to slake a private vengeance, ended by giving him a full measure of regard. The expedition had come through the hills in open order, not too carefully, since there were none stirring in the region to carry alarm to the Missions, and with so little soldierly attention to their rear that Isidro Escobar and Arnaldo the tracker had come well within their lines before discovery. Even then, had the two men given no evidence of suspicion, of having noted the camps and the numbers of them,

they might have passed without hindrance; and Arnaldo's ruse of lying down as if for the night's sleep within cry of their sentries had almost served, would have answered, perhaps, to throw off pursuit; but word of their passing had reached Mascado, and acted as an irritant to the unhealed scratches he had brought away from Las Chimineas.

Mascado had not two thoughts in his head when he set himself upon the trail of Escobar. He followed it as a hound follows the slot of a stag, merely pursuing, and whetting pursuit by the freshness of the trail. He wished to come up with the young man, to take him, and to take him by his own hand; to wreak himself not merely on the inert body, as he might have done when Isidro lay asleep under the oak, but upon his mind and spirit. Mascado had a good hour of gloating as he sat by the sleepers, feeding his jealous rage by every point of the other's advantage: race, beauty, fine clothing, the lordly air, —yet he held himself the better man; so his musing hate advanced by leaps until it burned through the curtain of oblivion and woke Escobar from sleep.

Mascado should really have killed him as he lay, for no sooner was the caballero awake than his spirit was up to cope with the mestizo's and beat it down. In the first of their encounter Isidro had saved Mascado's life from the buck that had him down, and at their next meeting, which was really of Mascado's own provoking, had offered him fair battle which had been taken unfairly. The sense of these things turned the scale a little between them. Isidro, as he looked into his own weapon, yawned to cover any amazement, looked the mestizo over, looked up the trail and saw a dozen of Urbano's men come riding on stolen ponies, and turned back affable and smiling.

"*Buenas dias*, Mascado," he said, "how did you get loose?"

"Eh, have you not heard?" said Arnaldo, taking the cue. "One beast helps another out of a trap; his brother the coyote came in the night and gnawed his bonds."

Mascado flinched at the insult that he, who was *El Capitan's* best man, should be called kin to the dog of the wilderness; but without replying got them up and to the trail, had them bound

and placed on their own horses brought up by the riders, and so to Urbano, since he could not at that moment think of any better thing to do with them. He would have liked to meet Escobar man to man as they had met at Las Chimineas with the girl looking on; then, — but he blinked the possibility of ending as the other encounter had ended, — against all odds he would not miss his stroke another time. Urbano, however, would allow no outrage. He understood too well the advantage of a hostage, and perhaps an advocate, in case of evil days. Mascado would have kept the captives trussed like fowl, but *El Capitan* had a trick worth two of that, — he put the young man upon parole. Urbano was a man of middle years, and understood the ways of the *gente de razon* much as he understood those of deer and elk. To a caballero of Isidro's make-up he realized that his word held where no bonds would, so he was allowed to move about the camp of the renegades hardly constrained, but making no attempt to escape. Arnaldo, whose ingenuity showed him a thousand expedients, fretted continually.

"Let us be off," he said; "we have affairs in Monterey. What is your word to these swine?"

"*No hay cuidado*," said Isidro; "swine they are, but it is the word of an Escobar."

There was one other besides Arnaldo the tracker in the camp of the renegades who found himself put out of calculation by Escobar's devotion to his parole. That was Urbano's right hand, Mascado. Owing his life and some courtesy to Escobar, the mestizo admitted that he needed a provocation to the attack, — outbreak or attempted escape, or, at the least, an occasion for holding him in less esteem, since, though he schemed night and day to make good the humiliation of Las Chimineas upon the other's body, circumstances were in a fair way of making them friends.

Urbano's men had come coastward as far as a certain cover of dense forest, heading up among the hills, fortunately situated for defense, and admitting of raids from it to Santa Clara, Santa Cruz, or Soledad, but far enough from these to allow of such twists and turnings of retreat as would throw pursuit off the trail. There

was not one of the renegades but believed himself better at such ancient crafts than any Mission-bred Indian of the lot.

The main body of the cattle thieves did not go at once to the rendezvous, but spread abroad in the country about Soledad, expecting communication with a disgruntled neophyte within its walls. Meantime a dozen of the less adventurous fighting men and a few women, coming on slowly behind the company, established a camp and base of supplies at Hidden Waters. The place lay toward the upper side of a triangular cape of woods that spread by terraces down from the highest ridges of those parts. The wood was fenced on two sides; south by the Arroyo Seco, boulder-strewn wash of an intermittent river; north by a wide open draw, almost a valley, a loose sandy soil affording foothold only for coarse, weedy grass. Eastward the redwoods thinned out toward the high, windy top of the ridge, passing into spare, slanting shrubs.

About the middle of this tongue of forest, one of the terraces, which promised from its approaches to be exactly like all others, hollowed

abruptly to a deep basin of the extent of two hundred varas. On its farther rim a considerable spring welled insensibly out of a rock, and, after circling the hollow, slipped tinkling under boulders, to reappear on a lower terrace a runnel of noisy water. Scattered over the basin, islands of angular rock lifted up clumps of redwood and pine to the level of the unbroken terrace, and gave it the look of a continuous wood. Tortuous manzanita clung about the shelving rim and masked the hollow; no trail led into it; the Indians saw to that; more than a rod away it would be scarcely suspected. Only from the slope above, looking down, one might have glimpses of wet flowery meadow between the tall sequoias, but be puzzled how to come at it.

In this pit of pleasantness, then, the renegades made their camp of refuge, there to bring their prisoners and wounded, or to lie quiet until pursuit had blown by. Escobar, however, was not at first placed at Hidden Waters. He was, in fact, on the night his wife and Delgado's party rested at Soledad, bound to a madroño tree not far from the Mission inclosure, waiting the result of the

raid. He made out so much of Urbano's plan, that the cattle were to be parted in three bands, one to go to the rendezvous at Hidden Waters, the other two by devious ways to go east and east till they came to the wickiups of home, where the women and children awaited them, where at the worst they might be driven into the marshes of the great river beyond any pursuit. Escobar, believing his wife still at San Antonio, and fretting at his delay, was driven with the third part of the cattle to the camp in the triangular wood of sequoias, Mascado heading that expedition. But the renegades missed reckoning with their own savagery. The detachment having one band of cattle in care turned in at Las Chimineas and camped there until they had killed a beef and stuffed themselves with it, being so overtaken by the twelve soldiers from Monterey. Themselves they hid in the rocks among the gray chimneys, but the cattle they could not hide. The soldiers found these in the meadow, and driving them down, drew the Indians from their holes. Then both sides smelled powder, saw their dead, and called it war.

The first move of the renegades was to draw into Hidden Waters to council, and await the return of their men who had gone eastward with the remaining cattle. This gave Castro time to get his troops in order, and Escobar and the mestizo to become a little acquainted.

Isidro, always under necessity of keeping a keen edge on his spirit by trying it on another, used Mascado, who could no more keep away from him than an antelope from a snare. Escobar mocked him and his new dignities, frothed his anger white, or cleared it away with nimble turns of speech, and Mascado was always coming back to see if he could not learn the trick, or at least bear himself more to advantage. It was very pleasant there at Hidden Waters, the days soft and languorously warm, the nights scented and cool. The camp lay on an island of redwoods raised a few feet above the rank, blossoming meadow. The litter of brown needles looked not to have known a foot for a hundred years. Waning lilies stood up among the coarse deep fern; the wild rose bushes hung full of shining scarlet fruit. Deer went by in troops; great

nodding, antlered stags came and looked into the hollow with gentle, curious eyes; a bear came poking about the half-ripened manzanita berries on the rim; hot noons were censed by the odorous drip of honey from the hiving rocks. Scouting parties came and went softly, keeping watch on the soldiers who had drawn off to wait reinforcements from the Presidio. The camp needed little guarding; one man might keep watch of the whole south side of the forest, fenced by the mile-wide open gully, over which not a crow could flap unspied upon. On the north, sentries were posted among the rocks, where the river, only such during the brief torrent of winter rains, now ran no farther than the point of fan-shaped wood. Higher up it showed broad, shallow pools strung on a slender thread of brown water.

Then came word of the Comandante's sally from Monterey, and Urbano kept away from the camp, beginning a game of hide and seek to draw the soldiers and all suspicion away from Hidden Waters, and tire them in the fruitless hills. Then, Mascado being left with the rem-

nant to keep the camp, Isidro would make sport of him, gambling every day afresh with Arnaldo for the few coins he had in his pocket.

"Why do you stay so close in the camp, Mascado?" he would say. "Is it because you know the Father President is looking for you?" Or if the mestizo went abroad in the wood, "Were you looking for birches, Mascado? They grow better at Carmelo, I am told, and no doubt the Padre has one peeled for you."

"At least they have no right to whip me," said Mascado, stung to retort. "My father was of the *gente de razon*, though because the Church meddled not at my begetting they hold me as one of the Mission."

"Is it so, señor?" said Escobar, with exaggerated amazement. "Then I am no longer at a loss to account for your capacity and discernment." Then, human interest coming uppermost, "Was it for that you left the Mission?"

"No," said Mascado; "it was for leaving I was whipped. Much good may it do them! I left because, being a free man, I wished to live freely."

This was a sense of the situation which, Escobar recalled, Zarzito had expressed. It seemed to him rather a singular one for an Indian.

"In the Mission," he said, "you were clothed and fed?"

Mascado grunted. "You also, señor, have eaten well; do you wish nothing more?"

What Escobar wished, very badly, was to get back to his wife, but that would not bear saying. He began to take an interest in Mascado on his own account, and took occasion to talk with him oftener as men talk with men, though with a quizzing tone; and Mascado, being never able to keep up with his nimble tongue, paid him an odd kind of respect for it, though it also augmented his hate. One thing that drew him continually within reach of Escobar's tongue was the hope that he might drop a hint of the Briar; but Isidro, because she was now his wife, and for several reasons he could not very well define, would not bring her into the conversation. That did not prevent her being much upon his mind. He wanted her if for no other reason than to share the jest against Mascado or the zest of

this entertainment of events. If she were but stretched beside him on the brown litter, — of course that could not be since she was a girl, — but if the boy El Zarzo lay there beside him, it would give new point to his invention; also they could watch the squirrels come and go, or read the fortunes of Urbano in the faces of his men. And in the early dark, when a musky smell arose from the crushed fern, they might hear the whisper of the water and piece out the sense of sundry chirrupings and rustlings in the trees, — and of course she might very well be lying there and no harm, for was she not his wife? Then he bethought himself that there were sundry matters upon which he should have questioned her more closely. It became at once important to him to know how she thought upon this matter or that. He had been wrong to leave her in ignorance at San Antonio, believing herself only Peter Lebecque's foster lad when she was a great lady and an heiress. No question he owed her explanation for that. He began to hold long conversations with her in his mind, in which everything conduced to the best understanding.

With this he occupied much of his time, for

though he fretted at the enforced hiatus in his affairs, he was not greatly alarmed, even when Mascado gloomed on him, and now and then a wounded man came into camp and gave him black looks as being of the party that dealt the wound. For it began to appear that Castro was not to be drawn off from making an end of the freebooters. He owed something to destiny for the turns she had served him; he wanted nothing so much as to get back to his daughter; he had his adieux to make to the office of Comandante, — reasons enough if a soldier had wanted any for pushing a campaign. He had scouts as cunning as any of Urbano's, and, having an inkling of the camp at Hidden Waters, began to push steadily in that direction. The renegades had more than one brush with him, and when Escobar caught a presage of defeat in the air he left off bantering Mascado. It was a consideration the mestizo felt himself incapable of under the same conditions, and though he held Escobar in a little less esteem as being so womanish as not to twit an enemy in distress, he, curiously enough, began to like him a little on that account.

XXIV

THE LADY'S SECOND FLIGHT

"GO softly, dear lady," said Marta, "the horses are not far. In that clump of willows José should have left them. It is wet under foot; stay you here."

The night was soft black, woolly with sea fog; under foot was the chug of marsh water livened by croaking toads, overhead some strips of starry sky between pale wisps of cloud. From the willow thicket where the horses champed upon their heavy bits rose the odor of crushed spikenard.

"Mount here," said the Indian woman; "I must find a boulder or a stump; I am not so young. The horses are not much, but I had to give that José two reals to get them. He said the thing had a secret look and lay upon his conscience. Ts! st! Two reals' worth! Can you manage without a saddle?"

"I have seldom used one," said the girl.

"Now," said Marta, "go lightly across the field until we are safe from the town; then we find the road and hard riding."

Hereabout the ground was swampy and sucked at the horses' feet. All lights were out in Monterey; to the left they heard the rustle of the tide along the foot of a hanging wall of fog. The riders kept to the turf for an hour; it seemed longer. The fog cut in behind them, flanked them right and left, folded them in a pit, at the top of which they could see some specks of light pricked in the velvet blackness.

Once on the road the horses struck into a jigging trot, which is the pace for long journeys as a tearing gallop is for short ones. Jacinta rocked to the motion, and drew deep breaths of freedom and relief.

"What an excellent beast a horse is!" she said. "How long shall we be upon the road?"

"Until we are both well weary," said Marta.

The girl swung herself for pure delight from one side of the horse to the other.

"That will be long, then," she said. "How

good boy's clothes feel again! I doubt I shall ever grow to like skirts."

"I see no use in them myself," said the older woman; "it was not so in my mother's time, but is a custom of the Missions. No doubt it is an offense to God to look on a priest or a woman and know that they have two legs."

"I would that the moon shone, — then we might try a gallop," said Jacinta.

"With a moon," said Marta, "we could hardly have come so easily off from Monterey."

The girl was alive with the joy of motion and the freedom of the road. She had a thousand speculations, questions, and surmises, but got very little out of the older woman, whose thoughts were all of their errand and how to accomplish it. After a time Jacinta began to come under the spell of her taciturnity. The damp of the fog penetrated to the marrow and dripped from them like rain. They rode and rode. It should have been about one of the clock, and a sea wind cutting the fog to ribbons, when they turned from the highway into a deer trail, followed that until they came to a creek, turned up it and kept the

middle of the stream for an hour. The horses needed urging for that work, — the water was cold and rushing, the creek bed shifty with loose cobbles. It was necessary to go cautiously, to break no smallest bough of leaning birch and alder and so leave a trail.

"For we will surely be followed," said the Indian woman.

From the creek they led the horses up by a stony place to firmer ground. Jacinta was stiff with cold, slipped and stumbled.

"Have a good heart, my Briar," said Marta, "it is not long to rest." She chafed the girl's hands between her palms; the walking relieved the numbness of the limbs. Another hour began to show a faint glow in the east. They had come clear of the fog, though the drenching grass showed it had been before them in the night. When the peaks of the high hills eastward began to show rosily light, Marta grew talkative and cheerful.

"It is not far, dear lady, it is near at hand," she said. "I remember the place very well; a safe hollow under hanging rocks. It has a blasted

pine before it. I was there with my father when I was a child, and that was the first time of my being in the hills, for I was Mission-born. My father, though he was captain of his people, had seen that the God of the Padres was greater than his god, and what they wrought was good; therefore he was baptized, and all his people. But he was a man grown, and it is ill learning when the youth is spent, so it irked him to live always in one place, and because he was chief to have one say to him, Stay, and he should stay. So when I was grown to the height of his thigh he took me and my mother and came away in the night. It was the spring of the year, about the time when roots began to be good to eat and wood doves were calling all the smoky days. We came to this place where we will soon be, most beautiful, and it was all set about with flowers by the spring, and had a pleasant smell. Never will I forget the smell of the young wood in the spring. But it came up a storm of rain and wind, and my father saw that God was against him, for it was not the time of storms. Then it increased with thunder, and fire out of heaven struck a great pine in front

of where we lay. It ran like a snake into the earth, with a noise so that we were all as one dead. Then my father was afraid, and he took my mother and me back to Carmelo. So because he came back of his own accord, and because he was of great influence, he was not whipped. That was in Serra's time."

"I have heard Señor Escobar speak of him; he was a great saint, was he not?"

"God knows; he was a great man; for though my father had seen the miracle of the blasted pine which was performed for a warning, he could in no way shut his mind to the call of the wild. So at the time of the year when he was weary of his life because of it, he went to the Padre Serra and begged a little leave to go into the hills, loose and free. Otherwise he would be drawn by the evil of his heart to run away and bring great scandal on the community, and on himself the wrath of God. Now look you, it may be that the Padre was a saint, for my father has told me that no sooner had the word passed between them than he felt the evil go out of him like sickness. And when Serra had considered

the matter, he sent my father apart into the hills to gather herbs; and so every year. At the end of a month my father came again to Carmelo, and there was no further talk of running away. Afterward my father took me with him and taught me the virtues of all plants. Padre Serra wished the knowledge not to die out among his people. He told my father once he had been cured of an ulcer by the use of Indian herbs. That was how I came to know this place, for as often as we came we rested here the first night, and saw the blasted pine pointing like the finger of God."

It was full moon when they came to the place of hanging rocks and found deer tracks in the soft mud by the spring. An evergreen oak grew out of a cleft of the rocks and, spreading downward, formed a screen. Here they cooked a meal, and when Jacinta had eaten she stretched her limbs and slept with her head on the Indian woman's knee. Marta waked her in an hour, and though the night's excitement and hard riding left her stiff and fagged she set her face and rode steadily through the blazing sun.

They took some degree of caution as they

went, looking out from every high ridge, but saw nothing moving, neither Indians nor soldiers. They watched too, as they rose on the crest of the range, the white Mission road like a snake among the pines, but saw no shadow of pursuit upon it. The news of their flight was not confirmed at Monterey until mid-morning of that day.

They rode without talking, drank at springs, ate what they had with them, and though the girl bent heavily forward on her horse with sleep, Marta allowed no rest until four of the afternoon, when they had come to a little meadow beset with trees, which she judged safe, and affording pasture for the horses. They rested here for the night.

Thereafter they had no thought of interference from Monterey, but bent all upon getting to the camp of the renegades. The night's rest put them in better trim for what was before them. Jacinta had times of trembling, falling sick and afraid, thinking how she would present herself to Escobar in boy's dress when his expressed wish was that she should remain at San Antonio in

proper guise. She wished to talk of him, but Marta would hear only of Mascado. Nothing strange, she said, that he should take to the mountains and freedom from the law, for he was begotten in lawlessness in these same hills. It was a famine time in the Mission, when the old corn was exhausted and the new corn just springing in the field, and the men of the Mission were sent out to seek their meat from God.

"I had come," she said, "with Manuel and his wife and a party of hunters, she to cook and I to gather roots. It was a golden time, and the quail went up in pairs to the nesting. Hereabouts we fell in with a party of soldiers from Santa Clara hunting for runaways from their Mission. Mascado's father was a soldier. It is true I was taken by force, but my heart consented. It was mating weather and we both young. When all was known the Padre would have had us to marry, but it was discovered he had a wife already. Santa Maria! it was no doubt a great sin, but my heart consented."

By this time, although they had seen no Indians, they knew well enough by the stillness of

the wood that they had come within their borders. No deer cropped by the water courses, no beasts larger than the squirrels were stirring or abroad, rabbits cowered trembling in the thickets, or ran like gray flashes in the meadow, proof enough that they had been lately hunted. The gossiping jays let them pass with no outcry, sign that men were no strange sight to them. Marta would be often getting down from her horse to study signs unguessed by the girl, muttering to herself or breaking out with snatches of reminiscence of the youth of Mascado. Her mind dwelt more and more upon him as they went through the wood, tiptoe with expectancy. Once they made sure of an Indian moving at a distance parallel to their course, possibly spying upon them, but they could not come up with him nor get speech. Here the forest grew more openly, and they rode abreast, steering by certain points of the hills, but keeping a sharp lookout for signs. They had so arranged their course that they would strike the corner of the forest where the Indians had their camp at about midway of one side of the triangle. To do this they had to cross the stony open space

that fenced it from the rest of the tree-covered country, at that point nearly a mile of tedious riding.

It was while they were picking a way among broken boulders that they heard afar off, toward the point of the fan-shaped wood, the noise of firing. The shots came faintly and confused, mere popping and bluster, and held on at the same rate for as long as the horses stumbled in the stony waste, and at last drew near and sharper. But it seemed to them then and afterward that they had a sound different from all other shots, biting and waspish. It seemed as if a prescience of disaster settled upon them as they entered the rustling tongue of woods. The light was low and came slanting and yellowly through the pines. Fragments of lost winds went mournfully among the trees. The two women pressed close together, crowding the horses on toward Hidden Waters. They had not the material for guesses or surmises. The firing had fallen off, but not the sense of battle, which rested on them like a thing palpable. The common noises of the wood were of ominous presage. Suddenly Marta laid a hand

on the other's bridle; the two horses were neck and neck; from the close thickets before them an Indian broke running, his bonnet of feathers torn by the hanging boughs, the streaks of paint on his body smudged with blood; his gun trailed uncocked from his hand. Beyond him were three others bent and running, with broken bows. Then one plunged through the buckthorn, panting, swinging a maimed arm, welling blood from a shoulder wound. His legs crumpled under him from weakness, but he sprang up with a bound and died in mid air, dropping limply back to earth.

"Beaten, beaten," said Marta. Her voice was a mere whisper, but it took on a tinge of a savage wail. The place seemed full of flying Indians. They came in groups, sometimes supporting the wounded, but mostly these were left to themselves, trailing the blood of their hurts across the sod. A panic of haste laid hold of the two women; they pressed the horses, but kept with the main body of the fleeing, dreading as much to be alone ahead of them as behind. It was frank and open flight; where the trees parted to

a kind of swale or draw, smooth and treeless, the lines of refugees converged, making for the easiest path toward Hidden Waters. It was here the women had first sight of Mascado. He came out of the forest on their right, fit to burst with running, holding a spear wound in his side, the blood of which ran down between his fingers. He was sick and reeling with fatigue. Marta saw him first. Jacinta had no eyes but for the trail, no fears but for Escobar. The Indian woman's first impulse was to get down from her horse in the common extremity of haste when it seems nothing carries so fast as one's own feet. She went ploughing across the meadow, pulling the horse, panting, not sparing breath to cry out; he not observing her, but running with his head down like a dog; both forging forward, but slantwise of the swale, so that they came together at the head of the open where it merged again into the wood. They bumped together as not being able to check the speed of their flight, and Marta had her arms about him to steady him from the shock. He shook her off, not yet recognizing his mother, and at that moment Jacinta, who had

followed Marta's lead without understanding it, drew up and dismounted beside them.

Mascado shook the mist of wounds and battle out of his eyes and saw her there in her boy's dress, the same slim lad of the Grapevine, rounded and ripened to the woman of his desire. It flashed on him that she had sought him in the forest as the partridge comes shyly to the drumming of her mate, come of her own accord to the call of the tribesman, his, *his*, and the savage in him cried with delight; from the consciousness of the finer strain that lay fallow in him swept up a flood of self-abasement that made his love clean for her handling. Then all went down before the common, curious wonder of her glance. He threw open his hands with the motion of defeat.

"Son, son, you are hurt!" cried Marta. The blood welled from his side, and he drooped downward, grunting. Marta eased him to the ground, tore strips from her dress and bound up the gash, a lance thrust, Jacinta fetching water from a creek that babbled mindlessly among the grass. The act and her quiet rendering of it

brought the flying braves to check. They went more collectedly, realized the falling off of pursuit, took time to help the wounded, came and offered themselves to Mascado, now as much ashamed of his faintness as of dishonor. They got him on Marta's horse; Jacinta gave hers to a man with a gunshot wound in his knee. The party drew together in better shape, and still hurrying, but without panic, began to move toward the camp at Hidden Waters.

XXV

IN WHICH MASCADO HEARS NEWS

THE keepers of the camp lay supine in the late yellow light, on beds of skins or heaped brown needles of the pines, following the shade around. The women, of whom there were three or four with the renegades, stooped at their interminable puttering housewifery by the cold ashes of their careless hearths.

Isidro lay apart from the camp. He had his back to the Indians, and stared into the hot sunshine lying heavily on the fern beginning to curl brownly at the edges. Fading torches of castilleia stood up here and there, and tall yellow lilies running fast to seed. The air above the meadow was weighted with the scent of the sun-steeped fern; small broken winds wafted it to him, palpable, like wisps of blown hair. It recalled a day when a gust of warm sweet rain had sent him and the lad to shelter under a ma-

droño on the hill above Monterey. They had to run for it, crowding against the tree bole shoulder to shoulder, with the boy's hair blown across his cheek. He was conscious of a thrill that flew to his heart at the recollection and settled there.

Arnaldo lay on the earth the full width of the camp from Escobar. He seemed asleep, and now drew up a limb and now thrust it out in the abandon of drowsing indolence. Every move carried him an inch or two nearer the edge of the rose thickets and deep fern. Arnaldo was, in fact, widest awake of any at Hidden Waters, bent upon a series of experiments to discover how far and by what means he could get away from the camp without exciting suspicion. For the tracker had made up his mind to escape. Devotion to Escobar, in whose service he held himself to be, had kept him faithful to his bonds, but now the virtue was gone out of patience. He understood better than Escobar how the campaign went against the renegades, and in the event of Urbano's absence at any critical moment of defeat, doubted if Mascado would have the ability or the wish to save his prisoners. Besides, the tracker was greatly

bored by the company of the renegades; the food was poor, and Isidro had no more cigarettes, and though he managed to win all the young man's coin at cards one day, Escobar as regularly won it back the next. The escape must be made good in broad day, when the prisoners had the freedom of the camp, being bound at night and placed between watchers. Therefore he lay awake and experimented while the camp dozed. Being so alert, he caught the first motion of approach, and guessed what it augured by the manner of it. The noise of battle had not penetrated so far in the thick wood; the panic of flight, sobered by distance, brought the refugees up at nearly their normal discretion. They came noiselessly enough, dropping from the trackless stony rim of the hollow, or by secret trails through the manzanita. They cast down their arms as they came, and trod upon them with moccasined feet; they dropped to earth by the unlit hearths and turned their backs upon their kind. One who had broken his bow across his knee stood up and made a song of it, treading upon the fragments as he sang.

This is the bow — the war-weapon,
The heart of a juniper tree.
False, false is the heart,
For it answered not to the cord,
For it spake not truly the will of the bowman.

"*Ai, ai, ai!*" rose the wail of the women; they beat upon their breasts and cast ashes on their unbound hair.

"*Ai, ai!* — false is the bow," they chanted.

The voice of the singer rose bleak and bitter, and this was the sense of his broken words, sighs, gesticulations, and wild intoning: —

It is the arrow — slender reed of the river,
The feathered reed, the swift-flier,
The reed that stings like a snake,
That speaks of death to the foeman,
Like a snake it is false to the bowstring,
Like the snake of two tongues it speaks falsely.

Mascado came haltingly into the isle of pines, and held up his hand; the song and the wailing ceased.

"Faugh!" he said; "ye sing and ye weep, but ye will not fight, frightened at the sound of guns as children at thunder, beaten upon your own ground! Weep, then, for ye cannot fight!"

The men took the whips of his scorn in silence, but Marta's motherliness was proof against the occasions. "Neither will you fight any more, my son, if you lie not down and let me tend your wound." He turned from her and dropped sullenly upon the ground.

Isidro had drawn in toward the group of wounded with the natural motion of curiosity and concern. The prolonged dribble of fugitives over the rim of the hollow, the distress of their hurts, the noiseless effect of hurry and disaster, involved him in the sense of defeat. Being so fine as to feel that, he was too fine not to be conscious of the isolation made for him, as a party of the enemy, by the indrawing of their thoughts upon their own concerns. The best help he could offer was the turning of his back upon their shameful hour.

The sun, sloping far to seaward, parted the shadows of the pines in slender files by long paths of light that led the eye away from the prone and sullen fighting men toward the lonely wood. Isidro let his gaze rove down the yellow lane, walked toward the outskirts of the camp,

leaned his back against a tree, looking into the shadowy hollow of Hidden Waters, thinking homesickly of El Zarzo, and turning presently, obedient to the instinct which warns of approaching presence, saw her there. She stood beyond him in the shadow, where the sunbeams filtering through the boughs of pines spread a vapor thin and blue, — the erect young figure and the level, unfrightened gaze. He could have touched her where she stood, but made no motion; his pulse leaped toward her with the tug of his startled spirit.

"Lad, lad," he whispered.

"Señor," she breathed.

A long flight of time went over them while they stood in the shadow and each grew aware, without so much as daring to look, what absence and circumstance had wrought upon the other. A keen and sudden whistling shocked their spirits back to the sense of things, as the naked blade of a knife flashed between them and sunk to the hilt in the earth at their feet. Back in the camp Mascado had half raised himself from his bed to throw it, and now leaned upon his elbow

watching them with keen darts of hate. They saw the weary and sullen braves turn toward him with momentary amazement, and Marta running to ease him to the ground with a steady flow of talk, presenting her broad back as a screen between the pair and him. The knife handle still quivered in the sod.

"Now if he were not already a fallen man I could kill him for that," said Isidro.

"Let him be," said the girl; "Marta has much to say to him."

"And I to you, Lady Wife; I left you safe at San Antonio; how comes it that you are here?"

It was a long story, and the best telling of it would have left something wanting to a full understanding. Jacinta lifted up her eyes and laid it bare. Isidro could not escape the conviction that this detached young spirit loved him, and for a man who meant to make a priest of himself took it light-heartedly.

"I did wrong," he said, "to leave you so; wrong, again, not to go straight to you from Peter Lebecque's. Will you sit? There is much to tell."

They sat down on the strong roots of the redwood. Mascado's knife stuck in the ground between them. They told their story in concert, capping each other's adventures with coincidences of time and occasion, with now and then a shy hint of explanation of motive or impulse, not clear but wonderfully satisfactory. They thrilled together over the fact of their nearness on the night of the raid at Soledad, and discovered in themselves on that occasion presentiments that should have warned each of the other's proximity. They touched lightly on the reasons for Jacinta's flight toward Hidden Waters. She was afraid, she said, lest Mascado should do him harm, and only Marta could persuade Mascado; this did not quite account for Jacinta, but they let it go at that.

The light failed out of the hollow, and little fires began to glow among the dead leaves. An Indian woman brought them food heaped on a piece of bark. Pungent odors of night-blooming plants came out of the meadow, and the wind creaked the drowsy redwoods. Jacinta told of her night's sally from Monterey, the long strain

of riding, the shock of the battle and retreat. Isidro's hand crept out along the gnarly roots; another hand fluttered toward it and lay softly in its grasp.

"Oh, my Briar, Wild Rose of the Mountain, was it worth while to endure so long, to risk so much?"

"It was worth," she whispered.

An Indian came up and plucked Isidro silently from the earth and led him to his bonds. The girl crept away to Marta. Mascado's knife stuck still in the ground.

The first thing Isidro did in the morning, when he had his freedom, was to pull up the blade and carry it to Mascado. The renegade's face was set in its usual lines of severity, but the rage and sweat of battle, the drain of his wound, more than all, the fever of his night's musing on Marta's news, had not left him without traces. He sat with his back to a tree, and his eyes were dull; he dropped the knife in its sheath, and turned away. Marta and Escobar exchanged glances.

"He knows?" questioned one. "Knows all," answered the other.

The young man turned back to Mascado. "My wife, Señora Escobar," he said, "the Comandante's daughter, comes to no harm?" It was put as a question, but appeared a threat.

Mascado, who was at the ebb of spirit and strength, made a motion of negative.

"I am surety for that," said Marta. Urbano's lieutenant roused; he was not yet at the point of letting a woman speak for him.

"She needs no surety," he said. He rose up stiffly, hesitated, and turned. "Even now we hold a council; it will be as well she remains a boy in the eyes of the camp, and is not seen too much with the prisoners."

"You know best," said Escobar with no trace of raillery. It was the first word that had passed between them concerning the girl, since Las Chimineas. Once spoken it bound them together for her protection, and they began to grow in each other's esteem.

Maybe Mascado's wound had drained a little of the graceless savage out of him. As the affair stood it was too big for him. He believed Jacinta to be a wife in fact and Castro's daughter.

Escobar had beaten him, and so had the Comandante. He felt the girl immeasurably removed from him; if it came to that, in her dispassionate contempt she had beaten him worst of all. What he might have thought had he been whole and his men undaunted is another matter, — one does not often think unharnessed by conditions.

Isidro saw the force of Mascado's warning in the sour looks he had from the defeated renegades drawing in to council. It threatened open hostility at the discovery that Arnaldo the tracker was missing. It was surmised that in the confusion he had slipped away to bring Castro down upon them. Isidro was genuinely put out by the breach of faith.

"A graceless dog," he said to Mascado. "He knew I had passed my word, and as my servant should have been bound by it."

"It is not much matter; Castro would find us in a few days at most," said Mascado dully; "but the men believe you concerned in it; I have ordered that you be bound."

Bound he was with the most ungentle handling. So much of an explanation was almost an

apology. It irked Mascado exceedingly to seem at that time to push his advantage against Escobar. Dumbly he was trying to pull himself up to the other man's standard of magnanimous behavior.

Scouts were out to try to intercept Arnaldo and to keep watch of Castro's men. The council proceeded heavily; men spoke at long intervals with dragging speech; gusty flaws of passion broke out and fell away as the smoke of the camp-fire dropped back to earth in the heavy air. One of the wounded had died in the night, and his kin sat around him with pitch smeared on their faces, raising the death song in a hushed, mutilated cry. The pine wood, the over-ripe grasses, the fruiting shrubs, looked skimp and dingy in the hot, straight beams of the sun.

Isidro had only a few words with Jacinta as she strayed near him in Marta's company, and those went contrarily, for mindful of the mestizo's hint, he avoided her pointedly. "Keep away," he warned, "otherwise you may draw their wrath upon you."

"You did wrong," she said, "to give back

Mascado's knife ; you should have kept it against need."

"Mascado himself will use it better in your defense," said Escobar. "Are you armed?"

"I have a pistol that I brought from my father's house."

"If the worst comes," said Isidro, strained with anxiety, "stay close by Marta, turn your back, and make no motion to be of my party. You will be safest so."

"I will not twice bestow my company where it is not wanted," said the girl stiffly.

"Eh, my Briar," said Isidro, "will you still prick?" But the girl had turned away.

The tension of strained nerves increased with the day. The air was close; it quivered above the meadow, and breathed like cotton wool. Toward mid-morning they heard the long-drawn, dolorous whine of a coyote, singular and terrifying for that time of day. Hearing it, one of the naked savages shivered in the sun. One laughed, and in a twinkling knives were out.

"Down, fools!" roared Mascado.

They sat down, sheepish and sullen. Flocks

of quail began to go by in numbers; their alarm calls sounded thickly in the wood. Touching the rim of the meadow they broke into whirring flight, running and flying alternately as they struck the farther side. A bear pushed eastward, snorting heavily with haste; squirrels began to move in the same direction with flying leaps. From the forest sounded short throaty howls of coyotes going by. Several of the Indians stood up, nosing the air like hounds.

It was about noon of the sun. There began to be a faint smell of smoke. Isidro thought it came from the camp-fire, but one of the renegades went and stamped it out. There was distinctly an acrid smell as of green wood burning. Suddenly one of the scouts broke running from the lower edge of the meadow passing through the camp.

"Fire!" he said. "Forest fire!" and went on running.

Fretting to get back to his daughter at Monterey, and finding any other method of driving the renegades from their stronghold too tedious and costly of men, Castro had fired the wood.

XXVI

FOREST FIRE

AT the first shock of the scout's warning cry the camp at Hidden Waters stiffened into instant attention, and instantly afterward, as if from the twang of a bowstring, several of the braves set off running in the same direction as the wild creatures had gone all that day. There were others who ran about crazily, picking up belongings and dropping them, recollecting themselves, and going on over the edge of the hollow with the flights of quail. The wounded cried out upon the others for help ; all were running and in commotion, dizzily, as men run in dreams. The wife of the dead man began to run, came back, and lifted him by the shoulders, dragging him a pace or two on the slippery needles, then dropping him, ran on into the deep fern.

Isidro had hardly grasped the words of the warning, but he understood the smell of burning,

the hurry of the camp, and the crash of deer like gray darts through the underbrush. He looked once at his bonds, and then around for Jacinta. He saw her running with her arms outspread, and observed that Mascado came toward him hastily with his knife out, and the girl made as if to intercept him. Mascado avoided her, and put his keen blade to the rawhide thongs that held Escobar hand and foot. He drew him up from the earth, and shook him as if to relieve the cramping of his limbs. Thought seemed to translate itself into action without sound. Escobar and the mestizo took the girl between them and set off in the wake of the flying camp, Marta laboring alongside them. She was middle-aged and fat; she could offer Mascado no help, nor could he on account of his wound do anything for her. Jacinta ran lightly between the two men.

"Not so fast," said Mascado; "there is worse yet."

After that no one spoke.

The forest of Hidden Waters was perhaps ten miles in extent, from the point where the Ar-

royo Seco cut the open swale diagonally to its thinning out on the crest of the range. Castro had started the fire at the lowest point of the triangle, and at several places along the open side, favored by the light wind which blew diagonally up the slope. On the farther side Hidden Waters was divided from the the rest of the wooded region, which went on sparsely after that by the stony wash of the Arroyo Seco. The path of the intermittent river lay dry at this season for more than half its length. Nearer its source a brownish stream spread thinly over a rocky bottom, and filled into boulder-rimmed pools that purled over gently to lower levels when the stream pinched out at last in sandy shoals. The wash of the river was steep and choked with water-smoothed stones, widened at intervals to several hundred yards, or narrowing to a stone's throw between points of boulder-anchored pines. It was usually just at the entrance of one of these defiles that the pools occurred. A chain of them, threaded on the slender rill, lay about five miles from the camp of the renegades, but higher up and barred from it by more than one terrace

wall, nearly perpendicular, and smothered in gooseberry, buckthorn, and manzanita.

The fire had been started toward the arroyo, and the natural configuration of the forest carried it up the slope. Toward the pools and the open stony spaces bobcat, coyote, and deer ran steadily, with the unteachable instinct for safety, and the Indians followed them.

Mascado and his party were almost the last to leave the camp. Beyond the meadow the wood grew more openly and the rise of the ground was slight. They could see the renegades spread out among the trees, running. A brown bear went between them, trotting heavily like a pig, with an impatient woof! — woof! as he crossed paths with the Indians. A coyote pack went by with dropped heads and now and then a mutilated whine. Squirrels hopped in the branches with long flying bounds, all traveling east by north. At the first barrier they caught up with several of the warriors who had not found their second wind, with the wounded and the women. There was no trail here, but heaps of angular stones, piled logs, and a nearly straight ascent of

a hundred feet. They worked up over this, every man for himself; nobody spoke or cried. They pushed up, crowding with the beasts. The smell of burning increased; Marta began to pant. From the top of this wall they could see, over the lower terraces, smoke rising; the fire had not yet reached the thickest wood, but rolled up by puffs from single trees lit like torches, and came from four or five points at once.

The second terrace sloped more steeply and offered a check to the running. The wood was still overhead; all the birds had gone on; the squirrels dropped to the ground, eating up the distance by incredible bounds. The only sound was the thudding of feet on the soft litter of the trees. The open places were full of small hurrying things. Two porcupines trailed beside Isidro, and seemed to find comfort in his company. He passed them. A fox vixen and her young snaked through the brush at his side and passed him. The fox mother snarled at him as she went.

Presently a sound rose in the wood and gripped them all with terror. It was the fresh-

ening of the afternoon wind which was to be looked for at that season, following on the heated noons. It blew on the tempered needles till the pleasant hum shrilled to the singing of flames, and hurried the pounding feet to the pace of increasing fear.

Jacinta and Escobar were still going with tolerable ease. In the strips of calico bound about Mascado's body across his wound a red spot showed that spread visibly. Marta had mixed with the renegades and the other women, perhaps to hide from her friends the distress of her laboring sides.

At the next barrier they could see the fires rolled together as one and the smoke of it glowing ruddily underneath. It spread toward them above the trees; particles of ashes floated in the air. Here they had half an hour of hard climbing, while the fire gained visibly. The man with the wounded knee, whose friends had abandoned him, climbed on doggedly beside them; he made no plea or outcry, but dug his fingers into the earth and climbed. The muscles of his chest seemed fit to burst with his incredible la-

bors. Isidro lent him a hand over the edge and ran on. Only once an Indian uttered an exclamation. The fire traveled more rapidly along the edge of the open draw south of them, and nearing a narrow passage of the river, it had blown over and caught in the redwoods on the farther side. Now the wind drove it toward the Indians from the middle of the wood, in two crescent arms like the horns of a bull. After that there was only the business of running. Jacinta and Isidro went touching; Mascado held both his hands to his side. The air was suffocating with smoke that blew over the fire and struck and rolled against the higher ground.

The wall of the third terrace had a smooth stony front rooted in a strong thicket of mountain shrubs. From the foot of it men and beasts turned northward toward the river. Above the hurry of running they heard the high shrieking of the flame and the deep crescendo of it as it climbed the slope behind them. One of the hurt Indians, arrived at the limit of his strength, sat by a tree with his head hanging on his breast. They ran on and left him.

Jacinta began to faint. Mascado held her up on his side, but his knees trembled under him. A sharper crash broke at their back; Isidro thought it was the fire, and for an instant the use of his limbs forsook him. He saw Mascado's mouth open, a ring of blackness in the brown pallor of his face, but he could hear nothing; only the sense of the words reached him.

"The deer, the deer!" cried Mascado.

A great herd of them, starting far south of their camp, had turned at the foot of the terrace and run into the midst of the flying Indians. The rush of their coming seemed to shake the stifling air. A great buck plunging in the thickets brushed between the two men; they felt the breath of his panting. Mascado, who had the girl on his side, heaved her up out of the path; Isidro caught her arm across the buck's shoulder; she swung there. The herd tore trampling through the thicket. Mascado's wound burst as he lifted the girl and he went down under the cutting hooves. The deer went on toward the river, Isidro and the girl with them. The buck checked and blundered with his double burden;

his tongue hung out of his mouth; the stiff thickets tore them as he ran. Isidro was able to help himself a little. Jacinta lay white and flaccid; her body swayed with the running, and the wind of the fire blew forward her hot, soft hair. Fragments of burning bark sailed past them, and lit the patches of ripe grass. The buck cleared them and ran on. Their skin crawled with the heat; the roar of the fire blotted out all thought; the boulders of the river were in sight. The buck reached a pool, plunged into it belly deep; Isidro blessed God. The wind, moving the free tips of the flames forward, lighted the tops of all the trees; roseate spires streamed up from them toward a low black heaven of smoky cloud. Between the boles he saw small creatures and Indians running. Now and then fires lit by falling brands flared up and obscured them, but they broke through; they shouldered together into the pool. Marta panted among the boulders and saw Escobar.

"Mascado?" she cried.

Isidro pointed; it seemed no time for considerate lying. The woman turned instantly. The

wind lifted the smoke and showed long aisles of yet unlighted boles roofed with flame. Marta took something from her bosom; it was the blessed candle that had burned for Mascado before San Antonio and the Child. The Indians thought her crazed with fear. She stooped and lit it at a glowing brand and ran back toward Mascado. They saw her holding the candle aloft in the lighted aisle for a moment, and the curtain of smoke and flame swept down and obscured her. It seemed as if great lapses of time occurred between these incidents, but it was a very little while.

Several of the Indians were crowded in a lower pool, and they seemed to call, but the roaring of the wood shut out all. The air trembled with heat; lighted brands fell in the water and steamed there. Men and beasts crouched to bring themselves as much as possible into the pool. Three deer, two bobcats, and a coyote rubbed shoulders with the renegades; two foxes, one of them with a burned quarter, whimpered at the edge of the water.

In the shelter of the boulders, and along the

shallow rill that slipped between the stones, there were small cowering things, — rabbits and badgers, wood rats and porcupines. When the last border of the redwoods was lit, and the fire roared at them from the opposite side of the gully, little dead bodies floated down into the pool. Presently there was no stream left to float them, cut off by the heat that scorched out its source. The pool grew almost intolerably hot, and shrunk at the edges. There was no other noise could live in the rip of the flames; the smoke billowed down upon them, and they had no knowledge when the day passed into night.

Isidro sprinkled water on the girl's face, still holding her against the buck's shoulder. After a little she revived and began to ask for Marta.

"I think she must be in the lower pool," said Escobar. "I saw her come out of the woods soon after us." Jacinta slipped from the buck's shoulders and found her feet under her. The water came to her armpits. Isidro took the kerchief from her head and wet it for her to breathe through and cover up her eyes. They clasped hands under the buck's white throat. The fierce

incandescence of the forest faded, and the pitchy smoke obscured them more and more. They edged together and Isidro took her in his arms.

"Where is Mascado?" at length she whispered.

"His wound burst; he went down under the deer."

She shivered in spite of the heat. "He lifted me up," she said; "I remember that; was it then?" Isidro pressed her softly against his breast.

"He saved my life," she said, "he saved my life, and I had never so much as a kind word for him."

"Think no more of it," said Escobar.

The girl was quiet for a long time; her mind still ran on Mascado.

"He was very brave," she said. "I remember, as much as six years ago, there was a place near Peter Lebecque's where none of the Indians would go, — a tall, strange rock in a lonely cañon. There had been witchcraft there which made them afraid. Juana, my mother, would cross herself if so much as a wind blew from it, and I being both wild and bad thought to frighten her by going

there. She was nearly frantic; Lebecque was from home, so she sent Mascado to fetch me. He was young, then, and quite as much frightened as any, but he came; he was quite pale with fright, and I laughed at him, but he came. He was a brave man."

"He died as a brave man would wish to die. Think no more of it, my Briar," said Escobar.

Billows of hot smoke beat upon them, the water hissed on the stones; she hid her face on his bosom. Presently she asked, —

"Do you see Marta?"

"I see nothing but thick smoke."

"Do you think we shall come safely through?"

"I am sure of that."

They were silent a longer time.

"What is that which stirs by me in the water?" asked the girl.

"It is a doe that pants with the running. It is better so, to screen you from the heat."

His lips were very near her face. They struggled in the smother of heat and smoke for breath.

"What is that I hear?" she whispered.

"It is a hurt fox at the water's edge," answered Isidro.

"It is a woeful sound," she said.

"Do not hear, then;" he sheltered her head within his arm.

The cloud of smoke passed a little from them.

"I would Marta were with us," said she.

"Am I not enough, Heart's Dearest?"

"You will not leave me," breathed the girl.

"Never while my life lasts," said he.

Presently he raised her face between his hands and kissed her with a tender passion. The tall buck stooped above them and breathed lightly on their hair.

XXVII

ARROYO SECO

ISIDRO roused out of a doze, leaning against the buck, to hear the slow soft trickle of the water that had come back to its borders, sure sign that the fire had raged out on the bald summit of the hill. The night wind which came from the sea blew up the arroyo and cleared the smoke; it was possible to breathe freely. He could see through the murk a fringe of red fire outlining the bulk of the hills. Heat and smoke still rose from the burnt district; logs snapped asunder in glowing coals; tall trunks of standing trees burned feebly at the top like half-extinguished torches. In pits and hollows, where two or three had fallen together, the fire still ripped and flared.

The Indians had drawn out of the water and slept on the warm stones, but the wild things

looked not to have moved all night, their eyes were all open and a-gaze. The air lightened a little to approaching dawn.

Jacinta slept on his breast, standing deep in the water; her face made a pale disk in the dark. The heat, the suffocation, the acrid smoke, the tepid, ash-impregnated water full of crowding men and beasts and small charred bodies, the intolerable tedium of the night, had no more poignant sense for Escobar than the feeling of the soft young body within the hollow of his arms. If he had not felt the want of a wife before he felt it now. It was something to comfort and protect, something to wear against his heart to keep it warm.

The sky lightened behind its veil of smoke. The sun rose above the ranges, shorn of all his rays. The Indians began to stir; Jacinta woke.

Her first inquiry was for Marta. Isidro avoided it, drawing her out of the pool to dry their clothing on the still heated boulders.

"You said that you saw her come safely out of the burning," she insisted.

"She came, yes," said Escobar, driven to man-

nish bluntness by distress. "But when she saw Mascado was not with us she ran back."

"Back there! Into the fire? Marta?" The girl started up for an instant as if she would have gone after her. "And you let her go? You let her go?"

Isidro took her by the shoulders.

"I had you to see to; it was done all in a moment; no one could have prevented her. She had something, a candle I think, which she took from her bosom."

"I know; a blessed candle from the church at Carmelo. She burned one always for Mascado before San Antonio and the Child."

"She ran with it among the trees. No doubt San Antonio had her in hand. The flames seemed to part to let her through."

"Oh, but you should not have let her go!" cried Jacinta; "you should not have let her go." She sobbed dryly; the heat and exhaustion had stopped the source of tears. The girl's grief was genuine; Isidro let it have way. Marta had been the first to show her tenderness since her foster-mother had died.

They sat down with their backs to a boulder, hand in hand, doubtful what the Indians would do to them. They had little matter for conversation; now and then Jacinta gave a shudder and a shaking sob and Isidro pressed her hand.

The Indians got together. Most of them were scorched along their naked backs, many were badly burned. Including Marta, five of their party had failed to win through. They did not talk much. One of them had killed a deer with his knife where it stood beside him in the pool, and they ate of it in the same sombre silence. Isidro, seeing no motion in his direction, cut strips of the flesh with his own knife, and toasted them on the coals for himself and the girl. After food the courage of them all revived. The blueness of smoke hung thick in the air, relieved a little above the cañon of the stream, which made a little draft of wind.

The renegades, with no debate, but as if by the concerted instinct which sets a herd of deer in motion, began to move upstream, taking with them what was left of the meat. They walked in the track of the water and gingerly among

the hot stones of its borders. They looked not once nor spoke to Escobar. Upstream and over the blackened ridge lay a safe green country full of game, and beyond that was home. By twos and threes they vanished into the mist of smoke. One of them, hesitating, at the last, half turned toward Escobar with a gesture of dismissal. Their game was up; they wanted no more of him.

All this time the animals in the water had not moved, shocked into quietude by the disorder of their world. The pool reddened still with the blood of the slain deer.

"Wife, let us go," said Escobar.

Jacinta waded out to the buck and put her arms up to his neck; he suffered it with timidity. She laid her cheek to his throat and blessed him, signing the cross on his shoulders.

"Let none come after thee to hurt thee, and none lie in wait by night. Let no arrow find thee, no, nor hunger, nor forsaking of thy kind. Blessed be thou among beasts."

She came up out of the water, and Isidro took her hand. They went downstream.

"What shall we do?" said Jacintha when they had traveled in silence a painful quarter of an hour. The broadening day brought them an accession of embarrassment, mixed with a deep satisfaction of each other's company.

"Yesterday," said Isidro, "the Comandante must have been at the lower part of the wood. I trust he is not far removed. We may come up with him. If Arnaldo made his way safely as I have no doubt he did, he may be looking for us."

"He — my father — does not know that I am here," faltered Jacinta. She was still greatly in awe of the comandante.

"No matter," said Escobar stoutly; "it is proper that you be with me."

The implication of his words reddened her pinched and weary face.

They made way very slowly, being stiff with the strain and exertion of the night and day. They met animals, rabbits, ground inhabiting things, bobcats, and a lean cougar mother mouthing three dead kittens, herself all singed and scarred, and came frequently on dead bodies of

beasts lying in the wash. Then Jacintha would think of Marta, and her face would quiver and draw pitifully, until Isidro would quiet her with audacious tenderness and set her glowing as from a delicate inner flame. Once after such a sally she smiled up to him.

"You are too good to me, señor."

"Eh, what!" cried Isidro in mock amazement. "Is that a name for a man's wife to give him? Señor, indeed!"

"Am I really that to you, Don Isidro?"

"Are you what?"

"What you said."

"My wife? As much as the sacrament can make you!" was his assurance; the look that went with it said much more.

"And you wish it so?"

"Must I tell you that, my Briar?"

"But you are vowed to Holy Church."

"No vow of mine; an old promise made before I was born. I am convinced that I have no vocation."

"And after all," she said wistfully, "I am really the comandante's daughter."

"You are — Ah, I do not know what you are. I think I shall need all my life to find you out, all my life and heart. Ah lad, lad!" It was always after a word of supreme endearment between them. He held both her hands and drew her up to him.

Castro, having delivered his final stroke at the stronghold of the renegades, drew off to wait and see what came of it, and to deliberate how he should strike as effectively at the remnant under Urbano. The condition of mission affairs, and the spirit of insurrection kept alive among the neophytes by the successes of Urbano's men, justified, in his sight, the severest measures. He esteemed the fire roaring up the terraces of Hidden Waters a splendid engine of war, but not for long. That was the day and, when the fire raged the hottest, the hour when Pascual and Don Valentin dropped in upon his camp on the scarp of a low hill, with fagged horses and bloody spurs.

Pascual, mindless of military dignities, called out to him as man to man.

"My brother, Escobar, have you got him? Is he yet with the rascals? What is that fire?" The two men had smelled the burning an hour since, and guessed what Castro was about. Don Valentin spoke more to the point and at length.

"Is Señor Escobar a prisoner with the renegades?" said the Comandante, visibly disturbed. "How long has this been known?"

"Since Tuesday of this week. It was at first a rumor hardly believed."

"We lost our way in these damnable hills," exploded Pascual, "or you should have heard of it soon enough. Did you light that fire?"

Delgado waved him aside.

"Send out the men," he said; "there is more."

Castro gave the order. "My daughter?" he said.

"Señorita Castro and the woman Marta have been missing since Wednesday morning. It is believed they have gone in search of him. Marta is Mascado's mother."

Castro's body strained with the impotent vio-

lence of nightmare. The news seemed to divide him body and spirit. He made as if he would have struck Delgado for his disastrous tidings.

He saw the men's eyes upon him from a little distance under the trees, and gulped back a momentary control.

"Montaña! Montaña!" he cried out to his lieutenant, and lapsed weakly to his seat; his hands moved fumbling across his lips.

"Put out the fire, Montaña," he said in a dead, flaccid voice.

"Pardon?" said the puzzled lieutenant.

"I said put out the fire, the fire on the mountain;" he moved with a feeble impatience at the other's slowness. "My daughter is there on the mountain; she will burn."

Delgado went to him. "Senor Comandante, it is best that you lie down. I will see that Montaña understands."

All the while Mascado and Escobar, with the girl between them, were making their running in the redwoods above Hidden Waters; all that night, when they stood against the tall buck in the pool, Castro lay in his blankets, burying his

head in them to shut out the shriek and snapping of the fire, the roseate purple glow, the great roar of the pitchy smoke going skyward. Bodily weakness served to intervene between him and the force of his mind's distress, which returned upon him at intervals like a spasm of pain. He thought Montaña and the men busy about putting out the fire, asking Delgado continually how they sped, and Delgado humored him.

Montaña had, in fact, dispatched men up the arroyo and along the open south side, but the first came back reporting the trees afire on both sides of the wash and the passing dangerous; the others found only Arnaldo nearly dead with running, and no comforting news.

"How does it now?" questioned Castro from his bed when they had turned him away from gazing on the hills.

"It dies out along the lower edges," said Don Valentin, propping his tired eyes upon his hand.

"Does it burn fast?"

"Hardly so fast as an Indian can run," said the conscienceless Delgado.

"And Marta had horses, you say?"

"She had; José, Martinez's man, got them for her."

"Besides," said Castro for the thousandth time, "they may not yet have reached the camp."

Delgado, who had seen Arnaldo, had nothing to say to that. Pascual groaned. Then they fell into silence and a doze of deep exhaustion, until Castro roused them, fretting from his bed.

"How does it now?"

"It burns slowly where the bluffs are treeless and steep."

"Will they win through, think you?"

"By the grace of God, I am sure of it."

And so on through the hours until the fire passed thinly to the tree line, and the smoke hid all but the red reflection on the sky.

Pascual and Don Valentin got some needed sleep at last. Castro's strength began to come back to him, and with it his collected spirit, which, though it quickened the agony of apprehension, helped him to spare others the exhibition of it. By morning, which broke dully, blurred

with smoke, he was able to mount and ride; but the ten years which it was said he had lost since his daughter was found came back and settled heavily on his shoulders and bent him toward the saddle-bow.

From Arnaldo's account he judged it best seeking up the arroyo. He sent the tracker with men to try if possible to cross the hot ashes to the camp, and follow the probable line of flight, for he knew now all that Arnaldo could tell him of Escobar and his daughter.

Castro, Pascual, Delgado, and six men rode up the stony wash. The stench of burning, the acrid ash that whirled about in the wind, the difficulties and discomforts of the way, took the edge off of anguished expectation. The men rode in advance, — Castro had no hope to spur him forward, — and whatever of dead they found they hid out of the way.

Isidro and the girl heard the clank of shod hoofs on the boulders. Escobar raised a cracked, dry halloo. The answer to it set them trembling with the eagerness of relief.

"*Virgen Santissima,* Mother inviolate, Mary

most Holy, Queen of the Angels," murmured the Comandante in deep thankfulness, as he saw her come.

Not the greatest moments are long proof against daily habits and hates. Castro's anxiety for his daughter's life was not of such long standing that his prejudice against Escobar was not longer; but his habit of authority was older than both. It fretted him in his enfeebled state, almost before he had done returning thanks, to have her appear so in boyish disguise before his men; chafed his new dignity as a parent to have her leave his house and go running to the woods after this young sprig Escobar; and since his daughter was above all blame, he blamed Escobar. There was a moment of embarrassment and chill after the greeting and congratulation. Don Isidro had that in his heart which fortified him against all frostiness of behavior. Castro turned to his men.

"Miguel and Pedro," he said, "will give up their horses to Señor Escobar and my daughter." He kept fast hold of the girl, but Isidro claimed her with his eyes. The men led up the horses.

She, who a month before had been free to vault Indian-like from the ground, suffered herself to be lifted up ladywise. Castro reserved that occupation for himself, though he was hardly able for it. Isidro went on quietly shortening the stirrups; the two men eyed each other over the horse's shoulders.

Said Isidro, courteous and smiling, "I give madam my wife into your keeping, Señor Comandante, until we come to a better state."

The Comandante turned abruptly to his own horse and broke twice in the effort to mount. One of the troopers gave him a hand. Isidro's hand was on the girl's, her eyes on his eyes. She stooped lightly; the young man brought his horse alongside, one foot in the stirrup; her soft hair fell forward, his eyes drew her, they kissed.

"March!" cried the Comandante. The horses clattered on the start; then they struck into a trot.

Pascual burst out a-laughing. "By my soul, brother," he cried, "but you begin well for a priest!"

Isidro blushed.

"I am not a priest yet," he said, "and the lady is really my wife."

They mounted and rode after Castro's men.

XXVIII

THE END OF THE TRAIL

AND what," said the Father President, pacing up and down in the mission parlor, "what becomes of your priestly calling?"

"Padre," said Escobar, leaning his arm upon the table, "I have no true vocation."

"You thought differently a month since."

"A month since, yes. Much may happen in a month."

"Hardly enough, I should think, to outbalance a decision made practically before you were born."

"Before I was born, Padre, and therefore hardly within my power of agreeing or disagreeing. But within the month, Reverend Father, I have been in captivity and distress. I have faced dreadful death, and fleeing from it have learned that I wished to live, not to do priest's work in the world, but for the sake of life itself, for

seeing and feeling and stirring about among men."

"You wish not to do the work of Our Father Christ?"

"It is not that I do not wish it, but I wish to do a man's work more."

"A month since," said Saavedra again, "that was not your thought."

"My thought then was the thought of a boy; but hear now what is in my mind. You have heard how Marta died, going into the fire after she had come safe out of it. We do not know well what was in her heart, but my — but Jacinta thinks that she wished to bring the blessed candle to Mascado, so that he might have that much of religion at his end. She took no care of what might happen to herself. It is my thought that God's priests should so carry salvation to men, counting not the cost, and I have not that spirit, Padre; I should count the cost."

"What, then, do you wish?" The Padre was visibly patient and, by an effort, kind.

"I wish — the common life of man, the common chances; no more, I think, — common du-

ties, labors, and occupations; to have my own house, my wife," — here the young man colored slightly — "and children, if God please. It is not much."

The Padre stopped in his walk and laid both hands on the table, looking across at Escobar.

"No, it is not much," he said, "not much for which to give over a great labor, toward which we thought, or at least I thought and you agreed with me, — a month since, — toward which the need and occasion pointed as the Finger of God."

"A great work, Padre, but wanting a proper instrument. I am afraid I could not help you there." There was a pause.

"What do you mean, my son?" said the Padre at last. There was a hint of anxiety in his voice, a dawning grayness in his face.

"I mean, Padre," the young man came out halting and reluctantly with his thought, "in regard to the foundation of the Franciscans — the Missions — there is much that sticks in my mind."

"You mean —" said the Padre dully.

"I mean — I hardly know what, except that

what you expected of me as to the continuance of the Missions in their present aspiration and direction has become impossible." He was going on with argument and extenuation, all that Jacintha had taught him, all that he had learned from Mascádo in the hills, all the eager young straining after ideals of liberty which fomented in the heart of Mexico, but the Padre held up his hand.

"Spare me," he said, "spare me." The old man turned away to the window and looked long toward the sea, toward the orchard, the laborers in the barley, the women spinning in the sun, the comfort, busyness and peace, the cross twinkling over all. He was used in these days to men who doubted the efficiency of all these; but the hurt, the deep intolerable wound, lay in knowing that the matter had been brought to Escobar by his own hand, the contrary judgment shaped, as far as he knew, on his own showing. He came back at last and laid his worn, thin palms on the young man's shoulders.

"Oh, my son, my son, could you not have spared me this?"

Tears rose in Isidro's eyes, and he touched the old hands reverently with his lips, but he could not take back his word.

"We priests," said Saavedra with an unused accent of bitterness, "have none of the joys of parents, but at least one of their pangs, — to know that those we have nurtured in our dearest hopes have not found those hopes worth gathering up." The young man said nothing to this; there was, in fact, nothing to say.

"I am an old man," went on Saavedra, "and a great sinner. No doubt I set my mind above my Master's, desiring what is not good for me to have."

They were silent for some time, and Escobar guessed that the Padre prayed. Finally he moved somewhat feebly as if he felt his age press upon him, brought up a chair, and sat at the opposite side of the table.

"What, then, do you wish of me?" he said with courageous cheer.

"That you persuade Castro to recognize my marriage with his daughter, or at least my claims to her hand."

"The marriage was duly celebrated with the Sacrament, you say, and recorded?"

"It was. But for the recording we had not the lady's name. It was written Señorita Lebecque. The Comandante holds that to invalidate the marriage."

"Hardly, unless conscious fraud was used, and that it was not could easily be proved. The Sacrament of the Church cannot be lightly set aside. What says the lady?"

Isidro had the grace to blush, but held on steadfastly. "The lady wishes what I wish. We are of one mind."

The Padre's face softened with a weary smile. "No doubt it can be arranged; I will see Castro. Now leave me, my son; I have much to think on."

Isidro knelt to receive a blessing; he looked up into the kind, pale eyes, and his heart wrung him for his defection. He thought of the quest of Juan Ruiz.

"Oh, Padre, Padre," he cried with half a sob, "I owe you much!"

"It is nothing. Go in peace, my son; the Lord keep you and make His face to shine upon

you." The old priest, left to himself, sat a long time sadly staring into the room. It is an ill hour for an old man when the objects of a life-long renunciation, lusts of the heart, the common human aspirations, rise up to defeat him in the end.

At the last Castro made no great difficulty. He persuaded himself that he wished merely to be assured that his daughter's heart inclined toward Escobar. Really the trouble was in his hurt susceptibilities at being so soon set aside.

All the lean, wifeless, childless years could not be filled out in a month. Now that his daughter was found he wanted time for adoring her, and though he had not been a parent long, it was long enough to develop parental proclivities for meddling in his daughter's affairs. His worst objection to Escobar at this juncture was that Jacinta had chosen him. As much as the young man had associated himself with the girl's life before her father had found her, the Comandante resented it. All those companionable hours, the captivity, the distress which they shared, their very youth which they had in common, Castro envied them.

The experience of an unhappy love as often as not unfits a man to deal fairly by a happy one. Castro had lost the mother, before he had her, to another man; now, it appeared, he was to lose the daughter, and in the same case; but with her, as with Ysabel, he had the passionate purpose to hold to the form and shadow of possession.

Jacinta left him in no doubt as to her sentiments. Now that Escobar claimed her she went no longer shamefaced, but wore her love nakedly and gloried in it. She increased in dignity; her beauty grew apace like a flower. Not all the artificialities of dress and behavior imposed on her by the matrons Castro brought to be her advisers had made her a woman, but a man's need of womanliness to love. Where Escobar put her in his thought she stayed; she might live a little above that level, but never below it. She gave Castro no warrant for his reluctance to admit the marriage at San Antonio, though warrant might have been found for it in his agreement with Valentin Delgado. He had gone so far with that gentleman as to recognize his claim to be considered a suitor for his daughter's hand.

As usage was at that time, the Comandante might have held himself bound, but here Delfina's tongue came aptly in. The interval between Jacinta's flight to Hidden Waters and her return had been employed by Delfina and Fray Demetrio in making the fame of the girl and Escobar a thing of shreds and tatters. There will always be these blue flies buzzing on the fringe of nobler lives, shaping them unguessed to contrary courses. Originating, if it had any origin but pure affinity for mischief, in malice toward Escobar, the gossip served him an excellent turn. Not much of it reached the Comandante, but it was in the air, and Don Valentin, who was not known to be directly implicated, heard more than he stomached easily. Besides, he had seen the kiss exchanged by Isidro and the girl in the Arroyo Seco, and being a politic youth as well as honorable in the main, Don Valentin withdrew. Castro was, however, the poorer for that, and Delgado made a beginning of that fortune which in the heyday of Alta California became notable. The Comandante, all other consideration going down before it, allowed

the announcement of the marriage at last, to quiet scandal. He would have wished to have the ceremony repeated, but Saavedra judged it inexpedient. They had in lieu of it a special service in the church of San Carlos, followed by a *baile* at the Presidio, at which both Pascual and Don Valentin outdid the groom in the splendor of their buttons and embroideries. The festivities were attended by the Governor and his lady, by everybody who could by any reasonable excuse be invited, by long trains of Indians bearing flowers; and it lacked but one item of an exceptionally fashionable affair; the bride, riding to the church as the custom was, chose, not her father's splendid mount as would any girl in her senses, but the same kicking pinto which had brought her up from the hut of the Grapevine in the train of Escobar. As the wedding party halted at the church door, Isidro unpinned a fly-specked paper from it, offering, in the handwriting of the secretary, a reward for information concerning certain papers found in the alms-box. He passed it up to the Comandante; Castro gave a thin, wintry smile.

"You have not given me the information," he said, "but you seem to have the reward."

Within a month after the marriage the Comandante got his release, and soon after that, the galleon La Golindrina putting into port, bound for Mexico, he embarked upon her with his daughter and Escobar.

Isidro with his young wife leaned upon the rail and watched the dwindling of the white walls of Monterey.

"Said I not truly," whispered the girl, "that when you sailed for Mexico I should be with you on the sea?"

"Most truly, my Briar, and with me shall see the world, though it seems I serve myself more than God."

"But that was not what I said."

"What was it, most dear? I forget."

"That I should serve God — and you." She lifted soft eyes to him, shy and adoring, as to a saint. It appeared she would make an excellent wife; Isidro, at least, was sure of it. He held her hand under the rebosa, and watched the town fade into the blueness of the hills.

They said to each other, and believed it, that they would come again and visit the places of their young delight, — the cañada of the Grapevines, the Mission San Antonio, and all the seaward, poppy-colored slope of the coastwise hills; but, in fact, they never came together to Alta California. The care of the Ramirez estates and the political preferment to which Escobar's facile temper led him proved sufficient occupation. Isidro came once, to see his father die, but Doña Jacinta kept at home with her young children.

Padre Saavedra knew them well in Old Mexico, where he followed them within two years, upon the breaking up of the Missions, the loss of which colored all his later years with a gentle and equable grief. His faith and the natural temper of his mind forbade that any bitterness should mingle with it, but he left much of his sprightly vigor at Carmelo, where the memory of him served to keep many of his following in the faith when all other props failed. Among the traditions of the Mission recounted by the dwindling band of neophytes were many incidents of his great-heartedness, and one, admonishing

"THAT I SHOULD SERVE GOD—AND YOU"

them to steadfastness, of Marta, the story of whose life and heroic end showed her in receding time a sainted figure vanishing between the lines of lighted trees attended by a host of flaming wings.

It was reported at the time of the secularization of the Missions that one and another of the Padres secretly enriched themselves from their accumulated coin, — the discoverable amount of which fell so far below the popular estimate, — and of these there was none had so much laid to his credit as Demetrio Fages. Certainly, when one considers the prelate he became, knowing the man he was, one might well believe it; no doubt he found his opportunity in the simple-seeming honesty of the Padre Presidente.

Padre Tomás de las Peñas went out of California with the retiring Franciscans, bewept by his people; but being a single-hearted man of few affections, had no peace, nor gave his superiors any, until he was permitted, as he believed in answer to prayer, to return to his children of the wilderness. He found the Mission in ruins, the church a breeding-place for bats, and his Indians

far sunk in original savagery. A few of them came about him again, remembering his simple jollity, and hungering, no doubt, for the old order, the comfortable meals, the ceremonial, the show, the sense of things orderly and secure. Neither so round nor so rosy after a few years of such labors, Padre Tomás set his hand to harvesting the few lean ears that a mistaken policy had left of the Franciscans' splendid sowing; and, it is well to believe, in that business wasted whatever of sinful flesh he had clean out of him, for it was discovered at his end that he had died of want.

Peter Lebecque, missing the Briar from the lonely hut of the Grapevine, and having no fancy for annexing another woman, perhaps finding none so suited to his taste as the silent Juana, took to wandering again, and was killed by a bear under an oak in the cañon of *El Tejon*, in 1835, and was buried there.

Delfina continued an uninterrupted course of busyness about other people's affairs until the influx of Gringos drove her and too many of her race on a lee shore; after that she became very

religious, as ladies of her metal are apt to become, and was to be seen on Sundays and Saints days telling a rosary in the church of San Carlos.

So all these, having danced their measure in the time of Escobar's life, passed on separate ways, neither more merry nor more sad because of it; but as for Castro, he got no ease of his heart hunger until he held a grandchild on his knees who looked at him with Ysabel's eyes, and the eyes were full of love.

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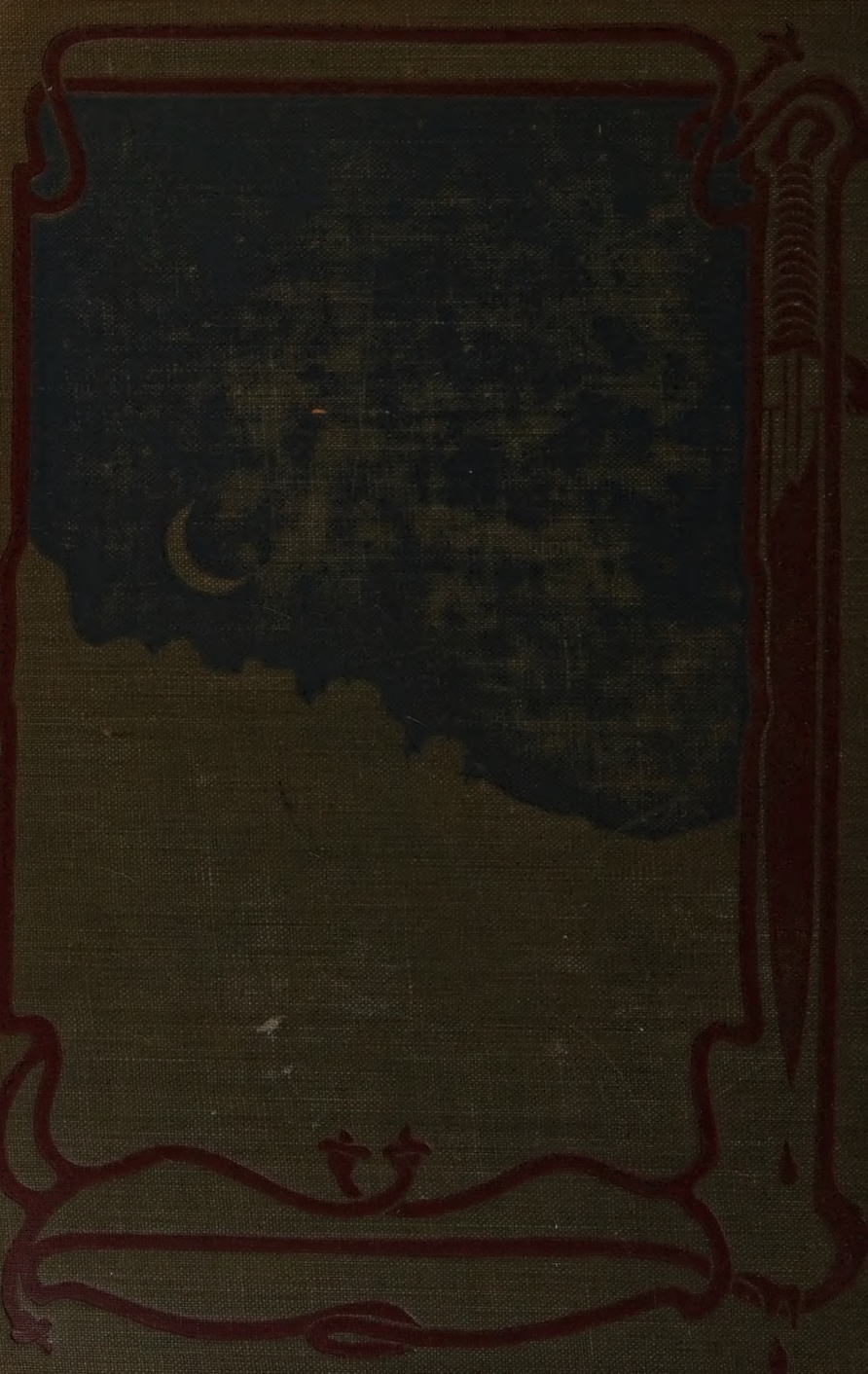
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